

“The Great Delegator”
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Mark 6: 1-13

Today’s lesson is about Jesus commissioning his disciples and sending them out to do ministry. Listen for and hear God’s word to us this morning.

Mark 6: 1-13

There are several ways to approach this text this morning. We could chastise the people of Nazareth for not being more accepting of Jesus and his ministry. We could join them in their concerns about Jesus and how he approached his mission—who is this person we saw grow up and why is he telling us what to do? However, I’d like us to look at how Jesus sets the tone for how to do ministry by sending the disciples out in teams.

God sent Jesus to save the world—to preach and teach. Instead of becoming totally overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, Jesus, the Great Delegator, shows us that we don’t have to do it all. Jesus trained the disciples by showing them how to teach, how to pray, how to heal, and then sends them out in teams to do the work. He didn’t have to do it all and neither do we.

Wilimon says: “Sometimes you and I overlook what a peculiar way this is to get the reign of God started. Jesus chooses people who, so far as we know from Mark’s Gospel, have no apparent qualifications to be at the vanguard of God’s new order. Their only qualification is that they are chosen, commissioned, and equipped by Christ.

“That is you. That is me. I’m not the only minister in this church. You are all servants and ministers—those to whom Jesus delegated the work of God. As your pastor, (he says) I’m not the one who does all the ministry; I’m at best a coordinator and encourager and an equipper of you, the ministers.” (Pulpit Resource, p.10)

Sometimes we forget that we don’t need to be trained church professionals to do ministry. The disciples were ordinary people with an extraordinary teacher. Jesus took these people from the common, ordinary occupations of the day, and modeled for them, a way to change the world.

Were they completely comfortable with the charge he laid on them? Probably not. Did they think they could do it right? Probably not. Were they sometimes overwhelmed by the time commitment that he asked? I’m sure they were. But they muddled through anyway.

Our world has gotten too specialized. We think that only someone who is trained in a specific area, can do that work. Think of all the jokes that circulate about someone not doing something because it’s not in their job description, or not their responsibility. The most politically correct ones usually involve a question about how many of a certain group are needed to change a lightbulb.

The disciples were fishermen and tax collectors. They didn't have degrees in theology. They didn't take a Dale Carnegie course in public speaking. They didn't study the economic implications of feeding the poor, nor did they worry about malpractice suits before healing the sick. They did what Jesus commissioned them to do. And they went out two by two to help and support one another.

Noted preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says: "Somewhere along the way we have misplaced the ancient vision of the church as a priestly people—set apart for ministry in baptism, confirmed and strengthened in worship, made manifest in service to the world...

"Perhaps we should revive Luther's vision of the priesthood of all believers, who are ordained by God at baptism to share Christ's ministry in the world—a body of people united by that one common vocation, which they pursue across the gamut of their offices in the world...

"To believe in one's own priesthood is to see the extraordinary dimensions of an ordinary life, to see the hand of God at work in the world and to see one's own hands as necessary to that work. Whether those hands are diapering an infant, assembling an automobile, or balancing a corporate account, they are God's hands, claimed by God at baptism for the accomplishment of God's will on earth." (Pulpit Resource, p.10)

Whenever I read this passage, a couple of songs start playing in my head. One is "You'll Never Walk Alone". Another is the Sunday School song about the animals going on Noah's ark "by twosies". The point being that Jesus doesn't send us off alone. This particular passage says they went in twos. In other passages, they went out in groups. Even Paul took younger disciples along on his missions trips, training them as they went.

If Christianity is going to survive, we need to train others to do the work we're called on to do. Our young people are leaving today to work with the poor and outcast in New York. They are learning first hand, the importance of doing the work that needs to be done—in Jesus' name. They don't need special skills to clean up buildings and yards, to dish up food, and to visit with the lonely. They will go together in teams and do the work that needs to be done.

Mystic Meister Eckhart once said: "A pear seed grows into a pear tree, and a hazelnut grows into a hazelnut tree, and a seed of God grows into God. God does not ask anything else of you but to let yourself go and let God be God in you." (Pulpit Resource, p.11)

During the summer months when our workload and meeting schedules tend to be lighter and less demanding, what could you be doing to help the church out? Could you find time to visit a shut-in? How about doing coffee hour after church? When you're shopping and see a buy one get one free sale sign, can you pick up an extra one for the food bank or a local shelter? Do you have a free hour or two to help at a soup kitchen or read to a hospitalized child? Would you be

willing to save your change and give it to the young people in our church to help support their mission projects?

None of the tasks I mentioned take any special skills, only time and commitment—and not a lot of time at that. We often think of doing God’s work in terms of grand scales. We don’t have to start an orphanage like Mother Theresa, or take a vow of poverty and move to a foreign land to do God’s work. We don’t have to give up our day job or take on the weight of the world--that's Jesus’ job. All we’re asked to do is our piece of it.

Anne Frank once said: “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” (Pulpit Resource, p.11)

So, how’s the world doing in your small corner of it? All of us, each and every one of us, are called by God. Jesus, the Great Delegator, divides up the tasks and gives us others to walk with us as we go. Let’s not wait another minute, let’s start changing the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.