

St. John's UCC, Fredericksburg
July 8, 2012

**“Empowered For A Challenging Ministry”
(2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13)**

Last week we read in Mark's gospel about people who were coming to Jesus to seek healing. Today we find a very different scene in our gospel reading. It is a very striking scene in contrast to the one we read last Sunday. As Jesus now enters his hometown he meets resistance....opposition to his preaching! Just think about this...after several healing stories, Jesus is now being rejected. This is not rejection by just anyone...it is rejection by his home people! Mark says that they took offense at him, which some have translated as meaning stumbling or some kind of physical reaction to Jesus. What is this rejection all about?

We learn a lot about Jesus in this portion of Mark's gospel. Mark tells us the names of Jesus' brothers as well as informs us that he has some sisters. Mark also mentions Jesus' profession prior to the ministry, which was a carpenter. This information gives us a clue as to why the crowd is rejecting the homeboy! First, Mary was probably a widow by now and despite the fact that Jesus has other siblings, he was the eldest son and therefore the crowd did not like the fact that Jesus left her in order to pursue his ministry. Secondly, the crowd viewed Jesus, a former carpenter, trying to elevate his status into the educated class by trying to teach in the synagogue. In essence, they probably felt threatened by Jesus. Just as they were amazed at Jesus and the person he was trying to be, Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. Other than laying his hands on a few sick people, Mark tells us that Jesus couldn't really do much in his hometown. You can sort of get the picture that Jesus was trying to touch as many people as a way. In reality, Jesus shows us

that nothing will ever limit him from doing the ministry that God has called him to do. Therefore, he went in search of areas that would be welcoming of his preaching and teaching. He is looking for people who will be a little more hospitable.

The next thing Jesus does is sends his disciples out in pairs and gives them authority over the unclean spirits. He gives them instructions regarding what they can and cannot take on their journey. The image of sending the disciples out two by two reminds me of a rule that we have every year at church camp. If a camper must go to the bathroom or back to the cabin for something or anywhere on the campgrounds, they must go with a partner. Why must Jesus send us out in pairs? Why can't we go alone?

I believe there are several reasons. First, we can hold each other accountable as we go forth to do ministry. Secondly, it supports the idea that when we go out in the name of Christ, we do it in community. The Christian ministry is done in partnership. We must join our fellow disciples in doing the work of the Lord! This means that we need each other in this congregation! This means that as a church we must work with other churches to do ministry! Lastly, I think being sent out in pairs is comforting to know that we are not doing this alone. As Jesus faced the challenges that day in his hometown, he knew that the disciples would face challenges as they went out to minister. They would meet people who would not want to listen to their message. Therefore, they needed one another.

Today we must commit ourselves to do the work of Christ as we are reminded that we are being sent out in the name of Christ to do ministry....a very challenging ministry. The Apostle Paul talks about this challenge in the 2nd letter to the Corinthians today. In the end, Paul says that he is “content with weaknesses, insults, hardships,

persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ...” We can face the hardships and challenges of ministry when we realize we are doing it all for the sake of Christ.

There once was a very critical search committee that rejected numerous candidates for pastor. A member of the committee then read a letter from another applicant: **Greetings! I understand that your pulpit is vacant and I would like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications. I’ve been a preacher and writer with much success. Some would say I am a good organizer. I been a leader most places I’ve been. I’m over 51 years of age. I have never preached in one place for more than three years. In some places I have left town after my work has caused riots and disturbances. I have been in jail three or four times, but not because of any wrongdoing. My health is not too good, though I still get a great deal done. The churches I have preached in have been small, though located in large cities. I’ve not had a good rapport with religious leaders in the towns where I have preached. In fact, some have threatened me and even attacked me physically. I am not too good at keeping records and have been known to forget whom I have baptized. However, if you can use me, I shall do my best for you.**” Well, you can imagine that this search committee was ready to reject this person until the man reading the letter said, “It’s signed, ‘The Apostle Paul.’”

There is indeed a challenge in what God calls us to do, which is illustrated by the Apostle Paul. He points to the power of Christ that is still revealed even in the midst of trials and tribulations. That is at the heart of our call to ministry. Paul also points to the fact that God calls each of us...yes, even those who may not look so stellar! As I have always said about my own ministry, I’m not called to please everyone, I am called to

please God. As long as I am sharing the love and grace of Christ, then I feel I am doing ministry!

Today we have responded to the great commission that Jesus gave the disciples...to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We welcome Lyla and Noah into the church....to bring them into this church family. As the parents make some promises to help in the spiritual growth of their child, we, as a congregation, offer our prayerful support for these children and to help them grow in the faith. We must realize that our call as disciples doesn't end at the baptism....we must nurture them in the faith. I am sure you realize that it will not be the easiest job, but that is what we are called to do! However, we are reminded today that we are empowered for this challenging ministry! We must turn to God and let the power of Christ's love to guide us on our way! Friends, may you feel empowered this day for a ministry that may be challenging, but it is possible through the love of Christ! Amen.