

“MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP: I – GOING INTO THE WORLD”

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Mark 6:1-13

I was in the store the other day and I walked down the aisle where the magazines were displayed, and I glanced for a moment at some of the covers. My eyes went right to the one with a beautiful picture of Prince Harry and Megan Markle on their wedding day, but then I glanced at a few others, and I was astonished at how few of the “stars” whose pictures adorned those covers that I recognized. I didn’t know who they were or even why they are famous!

While I may not know some who are famous today, I can tell you some who - would not have adorned magazine covers in Jesus’ day, had there been magazines in that day and age – and that is the disciples! Because, you see, they weren’t famous! Even though history has made them so, it’s important for us to remember that when Jesus came into their lives they were plain, ordinary people just like you and me. What they did for and with Jesus has made them famous, but when he came along and invited them to be his team, they were plain, ordinary people just like you and me.

In fact, we know that, for many of them, they were in the midst of an ordinary day on their job, when he came walking along and called them to follow him. Remember some were mending nets, others were hauling in fish . . . it would be like Jesus walking into your classroom if you work in a school, or into your office, or well, you get the idea. Put yourself in your place of work, and imagine, one day Jesus strolling in and inviting you to give all that up and follow him.

Admittedly, it is extraordinary that those twelve did that – they literally walked away from their settled lives to walk by Jesus’ side. But then, it appears that that’s exactly what they did – they walked by Jesus’ side. They supported him, they kept him company as he walked from town to town, they protected him, or tried to protect him when people wanted too much of him, or got too close.

They risked a lot to be part of his team, and while it is incredibly risky to do that, for a while it seems it was pretty routine. Until today’s Gospel lesson. Did you hear what changed for them in this lesson?

Today, he sends them out on their own, albeit in pairs. Today, he breaks up the team for a little while, and sends them out in ministry. Oh, it’s one thing to be in Jesus’ shadow, it’s quite another now to go and speak for him and about him.

Now, I don't know if they were nervous about it, but I can't imagine that they weren't. I mean, these guys were plain, ordinary people. They hadn't taken a course in public speaking, they weren't polished. What were they supposed to do, what were they supposed to say, what if people argued with them, what if they threatened them? Maybe this was more than they had signed up for!

Clearly, Jesus tries to help them out. "Look guys, keep it simple. Don't go spending a week packing up the perfect wardrobe and making reservations at inns. Don't worry about having enough money for the trip. Don't stress over how people are going to react to you. Keep it simple. Just get up and go. You'll be okay. Somebody will offer you a bed for the night, and food for your stomach. Just go and tell people about God and God's love and power. And if people refuse to hear you, kick the dust off your feet and move on. God will be with you."

Well, we know from the Biblical record that those disciples did just that, and their ministry touched many, many people and drew them to Christ. That first day was scary, but out of love for Christ and as those who called themselves his disciples, they did it, trusting that all that he had said was true – they would be okay, and people would hear the message of love, mercy and grace.

It is a great Gospel lesson, but friends, it is more than that, much more than that. Because it is our story too. All of us who joined the church, whether that was through confirmation, or as an adult, stood in front of the congregation, and said we believed in Jesus and committed ourselves to be his disciples. Which means, that he calls us too, to step out, to go into the world and share the Good News of God – and God's gift of Jesus.

I think that perhaps many of us, probably too many of us, are content to simply be a part of the team, in the shadows, as it were. We pray, we come to worship, we are active in the church, we take part in missions – but stepping out into the world and sharing about Jesus, that makes us nervous and is a bit risky for our taste. Am I right?

I think so. Look, one day I went to a district clergy meeting, where all of the pastors on the Wilmington district were gathered at a church in Elsmere, Delaware. The bishop at the time, Peter Weaver, stood up and said, "Okay, I'm sending you out two by two to go and knock on the doors of the houses around this church and tell them about Jesus." You could almost hear a collective gasp go up in the room – from pastors! He was calling us way, way out of our comfort zone. But we did it – and it ended up being really, really wonderful.

Now, I'm not saying you have to go out of church today and start knocking on doors, but I do think Christ is inviting all of us to ask if we are, or how we are,

telling others about him and his love for them. How would you answer him if he asked you that?

I'm afraid our answers wouldn't be very original. "Oh Jesus, I'm pretty busy with my family, and work, and school." "Oh Jesus, I'm not sure what I would say to somebody." Or "Oh Jesus, I'm afraid if I said something about religion to somebody else it would turn them off or change our relationship." Or "Oh Jesus, I don't want to force my religion on somebody else – they need to figure it out for themselves." Or "Oh Jesus, I'm not allowed to do that sort of thing at work – it's against the rules." Or "Oh Jesus, I don't want people to think I'm some sort of religious fanatic." Or "Oh Jesus, I don't know enough scripture," Or "Oh Jesus, what if they ask me questions and I don't know the answer?"

Did I come close? Would you have said one or more of those things? Now, believe me, I'm not condemning anyone, I understand. It can be scary to talk to others about the things of faith. But it's part of what we're called to do as disciples.

So it's important for us to remember Jesus' words to his disciples. "Keep it simple. Travel light. Don't stress about it. Take the risk, and if it doesn't appear to be working out, kick the dust off your feet and move on. At least you tried."

Friends, please remember that people most often come to faith because another person invited them to it. Someone shared their faith and they wanted it for themselves.

So, what can we do in this day and time? How can we go into the world for Jesus? Well, I think in some practical ways and some creative ways, as well.

I'll bet that at one time or another most of you have talked to someone else about your excitement about your favorite sports team, or a great book you read, movie you saw, or a great meal you had, right? How about sharing with someone about something happening here at church in the same way? It's non-threatening and invitational and won't feel like you're shoving faith down their throat.

"We're having a great speaker this weekend at church, want to come with me?" "We're doing this great mission right now, collecting food for a food pantry, want a bag so you can take part too?" "Hey, we're having an Easter Egg hunt, or Vacation Bible School, why don't you bring your kids? They'll have a great time."

In all those ways, you're inviting them in a non-threatening way to learn about Jesus through the ministries of the church.

I've told you before that a great way to share your faith is by way of the cards or notes you send to people. Christmas cards for instance. Be intentional about sending cards that are centered on the birth of Jesus, not secular cards. That alone tells someone where your heart is, in whom you believe.

One of the best ways to witness to others is by praying for them. I've seen that over and over again, even with people who are not people of faith. I was with someone once who is an avowed agnostic, but when her mother was sick, and I said I would pray for her, she started to cry. It meant something to her, and I think in that moment, her doubts about God were lessened.

Or ask if you could put a loved one's name on our prayer list. Very rarely do people say no to that.

I'll tell you one way of witnessing that is very effective, and that is to tell others about how important the church family is to you. The community here at this church is incredible, and there are a lot of lonely people in the world who need a community like this. Tell someone about how special it is here, and maybe they'll want to come and see for themselves.

Finally, social media. What we post on places like Facebook convey to others clearly what we believe and in whom we believe. So don't forget that if you're ever tempted to post something snarky or negative. Post things of faith and people will know, again, where your heart is.

Going out into the world today is surely different than what Jesus called the disciples to so long ago. But call us to go out into the world Jesus does. How will you do it? So many people are hurting and need to know that Jesus is there for them and can carry them through anything.

So I want to close with two brief stories about two effective disciples of Christ, whose actions point the way to Jesus.

One of them is right here in this church. At Vacation Bible School a couple of weeks ago, I found myself sitting at the dinner table with the youngest kids that week – 2, 3 and 4 year olds. Well, one little girl decided she wanted to be my buddy – a little wisp of a thing with long blonde hair. She sat next to me every night. On the last night, Katie Sparks was ready to get the dinner started so she told the children to bow their heads, close their eyes, and fold their hands for grace. So we all did that, and Katie started to pray. I dutifully had folded my hands, bowed my head and closed my eyes, and right in the middle of Katie's prayer, my little friend tapped me on the hands, and I opened my eyes and peeked at her, and she whispered to me, "This is how you do it!" and showed me that I should put my head in my hands. It was the sweetest moment. She was telling her pastor "This is how you do it!"

But it wasn't just sweet. What I learned from her is that she, at her tender age, knows how to pray, and it's important to her, and she does it regularly at home when they eat. What a witness she was to me that night!

Finally, a story Tony Campolo shares that I shared with you a number of years ago, but it bears repeating. Tony and a group of intellectuals from the college where he taught were together and they began to rag on evangelical Christians. Well, after a while Tony had had enough and he said to them, “You guys have got the wrong idea! You judge evangelicals on the basis of some stupid displays of zeal. For instance, at every Super Bowl game there’s some crazy guy in the stands who holds up a big sign citing some Bible verse. He expects that somebody will look up that verse, fall under conviction, and be saved. You think that’s what we’re all alike, and you just us by that kind of stupidity.”

After Tony finished, one of the guys sitting at the table took the pipe he was smoking out of his mouth, set it down, and said, “Interesting you should mention that. Three years ago I was watching the Super Bowl. It was just before halftime when the Cowboys kicked an extra point. Behind the goal post was that man that you were talking about. He held up a sign that read: “John 1:12.” I didn’t have anything else to do during halftime, so I reached up on the bookshelf in the den, pulled off my old Bible, and opened it to John 1:12, just out of curiosity. When I opened it, there were some old notes from a Bible talk I had heard at summer camp many, many years ago when I was a teenager. I read over those notes and remembered what I had forgotten and forsaken. I got down on my knees, there and then, and gave my life back to Jesus.” (Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, “What We Overhear About How to Live a Christian Life,” p. 106)

You see, my friends? All Jesus asks us to do is go out into the world and be faithful, to share our faith however and whenever we can, and let him do the rest. He bids us keep it simple, don’t stress over it, simply share. Pass on the love you know from God himself, pass on the happiness you’ve found in Christ – there’s a world full of hurting people waiting for you to do it.

May it be so.

Amen.