

Being Sent

Mark 6:6b-13

Introduction

What's more important, what you do or the way you do it? Are there jobs and tasks where there is a stronger connection between what is being done and the way that task is undertaken. We've all heard stories and some of us will have had the unfortunate experience of meeting a doctor who is excellent at diagnosing and treating illnesses but who has the bedside manner of an orc from Lord of the Rings. I've also met teachers and lecturers in my time who seemed to be convinced that the best way of motivating learning was to belittle students.

This morning we're going to see that when Jesus gives a task to his disciples he is interested in both what they do as well as in the way they undertake their task

Following Jesus' Example (v. 6b-7)

We remember from last week that Jesus didn't get a great reception in his hometown of Nazareth and this week's reading picks up Jesus resuming his travelling ministry. "Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits."

There are two important elements to notice in Jesus initially giving this task to his disciples. First, Jesus sets the example disciples are to follow. Jesus has just gone around from village to village again and while we're only told that Jesus was teaching, it's likely that he would have also been healing people and casting out demons as he normally did. We need to consider both what Jesus did as well as the way he did it. Jesus is to be our example. This applies to us even though we didn't follow Jesus around Nazareth or Galilee. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Second, when Jesus sent the twelve out to do a job he also gave them authority to do the task. "Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave

them authority over impure spirits.” Receiving Jesus’ authority means that we both have power to do what Jesus asks of us but we it also means that we serve with the goals and focus which Jesus has. When an ambassador is appointed by a country, the ambassador is given authority by the country to act on its behalf but the ambassador also needs to act in the best interest of the country. By Jesus granting authority to the twelve, they both receive power bus also have the responsibility of representing Jesus and so acting in line with Jesus’ agenda.

The Way They Were To Do It (vv. 8-11)

So then, as we see that following Jesus’ example and receiving his authority will impact both what we do and the way we do it, let’s look some more at the way Jesus expects the task he gives to the twelve to be undertaken.

First, the disciples were told, “Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.” The emphasis here is that the twelve were to rely upon God for their provision and protection. They twelve weren’t to take a club to fight off bandits, they weren’t to bring enough food for their journey or enough money to buy the food but were to trust that the Lord would supply all their needs. The specifics of what the disciples were instructed not to take is less significant than the principle being emphasised here. “Don’t trust in yourself for the task I am giving you. Rely on your Father in heaven to provide for you, the way I have relied on God.” Now, there are some aspects of what Jesus is telling the twelve to do here which is unique to them and to this time period before the church was founded but we do also see a connection to us today. All of us have a tendency to turn to self-reliance. We want to make sure we’ve got enough money saved up, that we’ve got our insurance paid for, etc. However, whenever you and I seek to put Jesus as number one in our lives that requires a measure of surrender and the biggest surrender is trusting the Lord to provide for us.

Related to trusting God to provide for us, Jesus tells people to not serve for personal gain. In a simple sentence Jesus says, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.” This sentence does affirm that we are to receive hospitality when it is offered to us, but notice that we’re told to stay in the one house until we leave the village. The twelve were not to go to one house until they got a better offer in town and would then move to another house because the food or the bed was nicer. At the risk of putting my own head on the block, I grieve when I hear of pastors who were serving small (often rural) congregations and then quickly left to move to the bigger church in the suburb with a great school for their kids. Of course many pastors move for very legitimate and godly reasons. At a more personal and local level, I wonder if a challenge for us is whether we’ll only take opportunities to serve in church or sharing our faith with others if it gives us public exposure or a position of authority? I’ve had the privilege of connecting and sharing my faith with politicians, university professors, sports men and women, people on tv and even Javanese royalty. I must say, there’s a feeling at times of, “Well, if this person accepts Jesus that would make an impact.” And yet the Lord has more commonly given me the opportunity to connect with and share the good news with shop assistants, waiters and waitresses, those on the street, people struggling with drugs and society’s rejection, etc. We are not to serve for personal gain and so we should share with whoever the Lord gives us opportunity to connect with.

The last little section describing the way Jesus wants us to do the task he gives us is the unusual statement, “And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” What is this about shaking the dust off your feet? To answer, we need to remember again that the culture of Jesus’ time is not the individualistic culture of Australia today, the basic unit in Jesus’ time was the family followed closely by the village. The situation which Jesus is describing is where a town refuses to hear the message that that the twelve went to share. Should a village refuse to receive the twelve then the twelve were told to leave

and to effectively make a clear statement that the towns rejection meant that they were to have nothing to do with the town down to the very dust.

The broader principle here is that the twelve were to be prepared for rejection and they were to understand the weight of the task given to them. Should a town reject the twelve the consequences for that town are very serious. For us today, we know that we may experience rejection from society and so that doesn't take us by surprise but we need to have the courage to share in the face of possible rejection. More problematically, we're also instructed to make clear that there are consequences for people when they reject our message. This is so much harder for us. We're well past the era of Christians saying, "Turn or burn you sinner!" and rightfully so! However, we don't have to speak with deliberate offence to make clear that there are consequences for rejecting Jesus.

I remember a speaker sharing about being a Christian worker on a university campus and a student coming up and giving a reason why he didn't believe in God. When that argument was met the student immediately came up with another argument. When that argument was refuted the student proceeded to keep giving more arguments without really wanting to hear the answers but the Christian worker found out that the student had grown up going to church before leaving. Finally the Christian worker said, "You're sleeping with your girlfriend, aren't you." The young man admitted that he was to which the Christian worker replied, "You're not really interested in considering evidence for God or knowing what Jesus has done because you want to live as boss of your own life deciding for yourself what's right or wrong. You can never say that God has rejected you because you've already made up your mind to reject him." No, it wasn't an easy thing to say but it made the point clear. A refusal to consider the claims of Christ has serious consequences and the way we are to do what Jesus calls us to do is to demonstrate this.

One of the ways today in which we may fail to demonstrate the serious nature and consequences of our faith is when we in church want to bend over backwards in inviting people to church and we give the impression that they would be doing Jesus a

great favour by coming. No! We're inviting people to come to know and put their trust in the almighty creator of the universe who came to rescue us even when we were his enemies. We need to present this with such confidence and assuredness that people understand the seriousness should they choose to reject it.

The Task They Were To Do (vv. 12-13, 30)

So then, we've recognised that the twelve were to follow Jesus' example and both received power from Jesus as well as acted under Jesus' authority and we next considered the way the twelve were to do what Jesus sent them to do: they were to trust God to provide them with what they needed; they weren't to seek personal reward and they were to be prepared to face rejection and show the seriousness of the task which they had been given.

We now come to what it was that Jesus sent the twelve to do. This is summarised in verses twelve and thirteen, "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed with oil many people who were ill and healed them."

First, the disciples went out, earlier we were told that Jesus sent them out in pairs. Jesus didn't expect everyone to come to him. People needed to hear about the kingdom of God and so he sent the twelve to them. Some of us are prepared to invite people to a church event (we want to invite people in) but are we prepared and willing to share about Jesus when we're outside the church? Now our Father has a sense of humour because, after preparing this message earlier in the week yesterday I was helping at the garage sale at Hatton Vale Church and had a man asking me a question about heaven and hell and so I had the opportunity to share clearly about Jesus paying the penalty for our sins. So I'm forced to affirm that people do come in but we also need to be prepared to go out.

How about you take a moment and consider three people, three people who need to hear about Jesus: Make the first person a family member; make the second person someone from your neighbourhood; and make the first person someone either

a work or in a social setting. Pray that the Lord will give you the bravery and the words to say to those three people about who Jesus is and what he's done.

Telling people about who Jesus is and what he's done is also part of what the twelve did. They told people that they were to repent which is to turn away from deciding for ourselves what is right and agreeing with God's verdict on who we are. If calling people to repent is part of the initial call, we're also told in verse 30 that the twelve were teaching people. We don't want to see people simply make a one-off decision to follow Jesus, we want people to grow in knowing God more and more and demonstrating his character and this requires discipleship and teaching. For us here, where are we at in knowing Jesus ourselves? Yes, we may be able to say that the Gospel is the message of Jesus living the perfect life which we couldn't live, dying on a cross as a payment for sin and then rising again to demonstrate his victory and bring life to us when we put our trust in him. However, are we continuing to grow in our knowledge of God and in understanding his word so that we can be involved in discipling and teaching others? If you recognise that you'd like to know more then I'd be more than happy to meet up with you so we can grow together in knowing Jesus better and so reflect his character to others.

In verse thirteen we read something else which the twelve did and we're not exactly sure if we have what it takes to do this, "They drove out many demons and anointed with oil many people who were ill and healed them." Driving out demons and healing people is not normally our strong points. However, while I do believe that these gifts still exist in the church today, the tasks are a bit broader and so expanding our view might help us see how to apply this instruction to today. The twelve were engaged in a spiritual battle and specifically were opposed to Satan. There has been many times Alison has needed to remind me of this when we have faced opposition and difficulties which seemed to arise out of nowhere. Alison has pointed out that these difficulties and the opposition is not out of nowhere but there is a spiritual battle taking place.

If I was to word things negatively for a moment, I'd say that if you were to come into church on a Sunday morning, not being more involved than enjoying some morning tea and giving a token amount in the offering and then being silent for the rest of the week, then you are reasonably safe from facing spiritual opposition. Why would Satan want to disturb those who are making almost no impact for God? However, if you take seriously this sending of the twelve and how it relates to us then you need to recognise that the task involves a spiritual battle both in those people and communities we're seeking to reach with the good news as well as in ourselves as Satan will try to stop us. This is why prayer is vital for our church and for us personally. We can not oppose Satan in our own strength. We receive authority from Jesus and we need to constantly keep communicating with our Father in Heaven who is able to protect us and who also sent the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us.

Finally, when the twelve were anointing the sick with oil and healing people they were both demonstrating the power of Jesus as they were acting in his authority and showing the wholistic nature of the Kingdom of God. The church should not reject caring for people and communities and likewise we must never forget the gospel when we're involved in social action with and for the community. Caring for the whole person is part of our Christian witness.

Conclusion

So how is your bedside manner? Does what you do line up with the way you do it? What areas do you need to work on or do we need to work on as a church? Do we forget that we're in a spiritual battle and so need to increase our prayers and dependence on God? Or are we needing to grow more in our faith so that we can share Christ more clearly and disciple those who want to follow him?

As we close in prayer please remember those three people that you can pray about sharing Jesus with and let's also pray that we know Jesus more and more closely so we can better follow Jesus' example in sharing his message with others.

[pray to close]