

“Reporting In”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, July 22, 2012

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Holy Scriptures: Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

30 The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going, and knew them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns, and got there ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

53 And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴And when they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him, ⁵⁵and ran about the whole neighborhood and began to bring sick people on their pallets to any place where they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country,

they laid the sick in the market places, and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well.

Debriefing

A pastor was talking with a hard-working woman
who was a devoted follower of Christ.

She was active in community service projects and present at every worship service.

Her minister expressed thanks for her commitment to being so involved and present every Sunday.

She said, *“Yes, it is such a blessing*

after a hard week of work to come to church,

sit down on the soft cushions, and not think about anything.”

Report in to share how life is going for you.

Catch up your Savior with all that's going on in your life.

Share with Christ and one another your joys and concerns, hopes and challenges.

*“The apostles returned to Jesus,
and told him all that they had done and taught.”*
(Mark 6: 30)

Disciples of Christ are sent out in pairs and small groups;
we're commissioned to do the Lord's work with joy
and sincerity.

When we return we are eager to tell
the highlights and challenges of our adventures,
and to hear words of affirmation and
sympathy.

In Calling and Character, William Willmon

imagines the disciples shouting as they return,

“It works! We are actually ministers!”[1]

The disciples return with joy and a good bit of pure

astonishment.

“Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!”

Jesus said to them,

“I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.” (Luke 10: 17-18)

“In other words, this ministry is much more than helping people,

more even than healing and preaching.”[2]

Ministry in the name of Jesus is transformational, miraculous, cosmic.

“God is taking back the whole cosmos through our work.”[3]

The biblical model for church leadership described here

guided both the first churches

and later the Disciples of Christ revival movement.

This biblical model taught disciples of Christ how to lead.

Don't work alone: do ministry in teams, working together for the greater good. *Don't become isolated:* be a

living presence and serve in the midst of the community.

Don't be ostentatious: live simply, and trust in the Lord to provide for your physical and spiritual needs.

Don't be obstinate: when you are rejected or ignored, let go of any grudges or discontent, learn the lessons you must, and move on.

Don't neglect the disinherited: emulate Jesus by serving to and with the marginalized, calling them by name, and ministering as a servant leader.

Don't forget who or whose you are: you are a child of God, baptized, called and anointed to serve humbly, as one with divine authority, with "...no arrogant display of power, for [you are] the servant of God whose ministry will take [you] to the cross."^[4] *Do take your cue from God as revealed in Jesus Christ.* Look first to Jesus as the embodiment of messiah, mission and message.

After their debriefing,

Jesus said to them,

“Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.” (Mark 6: 31)

After Debriefing comes the Deserting.

Do you recall the Southwest Airlines commercial

that shows a person in someone else's bathroom?

She is opening the bathroom cabinet to peek at their private meds,

when suddenly the glass shelf shatters,

and there is no hiding that she is nosey.

And a deep voice over says, "*Want to get away?*"

You know, Jesus offers that opportunity, too.

Your just dessert

for pouring yourself out in love and service

is to desert from the crowd.

Jesus receives our many gifts.

He then offers one of his own.

Steal away with Jesus to rest.

Relax. Retreat for a bit to recover and re-create.

Your generosity and giving spirits have earned you some R & R.

Regularly do we offer our gifts and selves for ministry;

we should also regularly practice self care.

Stephen R. Covey passed away this week.

He wrote The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

The seventh habit he advocates is to sharpen your saw.

Christians call this practicing the Sabbath.

He tells the story of a man struggling in the woods to saw down a tree.

An old farmer came by, watched for a while,

and then quietly said, “What are you doing?”

“Can’t you see?” the man impatiently replied, “I’m sawing down this tree.”

“You look exhausted,” said the farmer. “How long have you been at it?”

“Over five hours, and I’m beat,” replied the man. “This is hard work.”

“That saw looks pretty dull,” said the farmer.

“Why don’t you take a break for a few minutes and sharpen it?

I’m sure it would go a lot faster.”

“I don’t have time to sharpen the saw,” the man said emphatically.

“I’m too busy sawing!”

Each time we make the effort to stop and in order to sharpen our saws and be renewed,

in the long run

the time, the love, and the life we save may be our own.

Practice the Sabbath – make time for recovery, rest and renewal.

Disciples of Christ who seek to be effective sharpen and hone their tools.

Make it a priority to set aside time

for spiritual reflection, Bible study,

continuing education, and Sabbath time.

Effective ministry in the name of Jesus is transformational, miraculous, cosmic.

“God is taking back the whole cosmos through our work.”[5]

Having said that, recognize that interruptions may follow – they often do.

Look to see how Jesus handles interruptions so graciously

– remember that ministry is in the interruptions.

Rather than seeing the interrupting crowd as a hassle,

Jesus looks on them with compassion,

which overrides his immediate need for rest or expectation for order.

He sees this as a teachable moment with which

to show God's people a better way to live, to love, to laugh and serve.

Using ministry as an example, translate this into your daily life.

If music is in the pause between the notes,

then ministry is in the interruptions of the day.

You are dashing out the door of your home in route to a meeting

and the phone rings.

A young person is looking for some courage and moral support

before she shows her mom a report card.

The Church newsletter deadline is already past and the pressure is on,

and there is a knock on the study door

because someone has dropped by for a chat,

or a prayer, or a couple of dollars for
gas, or a shoulder to lean on.

You are engrossed in conversation with an Elder

and the tug at your arm is from a child

who needs to tell you a secret.

Jesus Christ knocks on our doors all the time,

and He has yet to make an appointment.

If you look at this passage from the perspective of the crowd,

through our eyes as we look to Christ for help and
healing and hope,

then you and I are reminded by the word

that Jesus always has time and a word
and a helping hand for us.

After debriefing God on the latest and greatest events and
insights,

after deserting from the hubbub for renewal and
recovery,

we return into the community for the declaring.

Declaring

“And wherever [Jesus] went,
into villages or cities or farms,
they laid the sick in the marketplaces,
and begged him that they might touch
even the fringe of his cloak;
and all who touched it were
healed.” (Mark 6: 56)

The Gospel according to Mark declares

that ALL who touched the hem of his cloak were
healed.

Not some, not a few, not the chosen, not the
select or the elect. All!

Both Matthew and Luke declare that a woman was ill whom
none could heal.

She said to herself, *“If I only touch his garment, I
shall be made well.”*

Jesus turned, and seeing her he said,

*“Take heart, daughter; your faith has
made you well.”*

For the rest of her life she could celebrate

that she had reached out with faith

and barely touched the fringe of his garment.

She could declare, *“Look, see what the Lord has done for me!”*

Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether has the wonderful line,

“Touch we now thy garment’s hem.”

Draw near to the presence of the Living Christ;

close your eyes,

open your hands,

and stretch them out to touch the fringe of his garment.

Even the fringe, the hem, the edge of the presence of the Holy

is sufficient to heal, to forgive, to redeem,

and to completely cleanse our lives.

Stay in touch with Christ, even if it is to touch the hem of his garment.

Ministry empowered by Jesus is transformational, miraculous, cosmic.

“God is taking back the whole cosmos through our work.”[6]

Has it been within your experience that you have felt at times
that a portion of God's love has been sufficient?

Have you ever thought that a taste, a touch, a whisper, a
glimpse of the holy
has been more than sufficient
to give you a solid sense of enough?

In what ways have you experienced that Christ is bigger than
the Church?

Do you see Christ declaring his dominion over evil, greed,
and senseless violence

not only in the Church and through the Church to the
world,

but also on the fringes of society where the
church has yet to impact?

Or has ignored? Or forgotten?

Or has so badly wounded?

And yet, the Good News is that the hem of God's grace

rests elsewhere and everywhere,
declaring that every soul is precious and
worthy.

Who do you know who is feeling distant, removed, on the
fringe,

outside, living on the edge, excluded or not included in
the dance?

Do you think that this week God is calling you

to reach out with a helping hand and a kind word of
grace,

and to declare the love of God is for one and all?

What would you declare if you knew that God would not let
you fail?

If you knew that the word of God does not return
unfulfilled?

If you knew that now that you have debriefed and shared,

deserted and rested,

that your declaration of love

is the very change the Lord has been
waiting to empower?

I know, we do get weary, weary.

We question and wonder and question some more.

That is fine.

You and I are not alone in our needs to debrief, desert, and declare.

My mother-in-law (mother-in-love in our family tradition)

Nancy Brewer wrote the following poem,
entitled "GENE POOL" (October 2011).

I've done my share. I've paid my dues.

Volunteers needed? Well, I refuse.

Chair a committee? If truth be told,

I've chaired a-many, but I'm just too old.

Well, just take the minutes, an easy task.

No, I've had my turn, so please don't ask.

No more casseroles will I bake.

No more raffle tickets will I take.

The community garden is ready to plant.

When they call for help, I'll say "I can't."

I glance in the mirror and with shock I see
the face of my Mom, looking back at me.

Memories flood of how she slipped away,
With the ledger balanced for that fated day.
A bookkeeper, retired from that lifetime career,
She was some group's treasurer, year after year.
Cake in the freezer for a Fellowship meal,
With banana bread ready for a food appeal.
February birthday cards written in advance,
Tithe checks written, nothing left to chance.
She transported "older ladies," then a stroke
Was just a nuisance of which she rarely spoke.
In her ninth decade, she could no longer drive,
But caring for others kept my Mom alive.

I glance in the mirror, and I see through a blur
my mother's daughter, wishing it was her.

Her genes, her example, my habits? I'd guess
when they call for volunteers, I'll likely say "yes."

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit. Amen!*

Call to Communion

"[Jesus] saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things." (Mark 6: 34)

Throughout the Gospel of Mark we encounter a Christ who had three main objectives: to preach, to teach, and to heal. However, at the core of Christ's loving activity is the quality of his compassion for the whole people of God.

Like sheep without a shepherd, we need one to guide and love us into grace. We all need empathy, kindness, and tender loving care. Yes, Jesus will teach, preach and heal us into wholeness. But first he will look at you, love you, and have compassion for you.

Benediction

Loving Lord, we have touched the hem of your cloak. We have dined at your Table. We have communed with your Holy Spirit. We have sung your praises and lifted up prayers of intercession and thanksgiving. Now send us forth to be and share the Good News. In your name we grow and go forward! Amen.

[1] William H. Willimon, Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 138.

[2] *Ibid.*, 138.

[3] *Ibid.*, 138.

[4] Fred Craddock, et al, Editors, Preaching the New Common Lectionary, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 119.

[5] Ibid., 138.

[6] Ibid., 138.