

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Being Sent”
Mark 6:1-30
January 31, 2016

Sometimes it's really hard to absorb what we hear in the news. A militant standoff in a wildlife refuge. A virus out of Brazil that is deforming newborns... and now it's spreading. More dead bodies washing up on the shore of Greece, refugees and their children still drowning in masses. There is always another overwhelming story of violence or tragedy that is making the headlines. It's part of our shrinking world. We're now privy to every news-worthy moment across the planet. And it's a bit much. Sometimes there's more than we can absorb.

But it's not just global stories that get you, is it? The news the last few weeks coming out of St. Louis has been hard on a lot of you, I know. I saw how glassy eyed some of you were when the news finally broke: ***“The Rams head to LA”*** It was a painful blow. And let's be honest, it's been a hard year for you all. Add the loss of the Rams to the fact that the Chiefs had one of their best years in a long time... and well, the Royals have been to the World Series... how many times in a row now?

You all are having a rough go of it, aren't you? And there are some doubts creeping up in your heart about which city in Missouri is actually the best sports town. It's OK. We can do some pastoral counseling around that if you'd like.

OK, so sometimes we get riled up over the trivial. But there are times when you really don't know what to do with this crazy world we are living in. Wars, and famine, and greed, and self-protectionism, and lies, and it feels like the world is falling apart. And there is absolutely nothing you can do about it.

You feel helpless... which is really frustrating because we, the church, we, the body of Christ, are called to do something about it. After all, we've been sent by God to be the hands and feet of Jesus... to continue to ministry of Jesus, to enact the good news of Jesus. This is our great calling, young and old alike.

But how, in this-screwed-up world of ours...
how are we supposed to do that?

Of course we're not the first Christians to ask that question, are we? I imagine there have been Christians in just about every generation asking the question. Certainly the Church in Mark's time was asking it. Mark's writing his gospel in a time when the church is in crisis and the world seems to be falling apart around them.

The Jewish revolt **in Jerusalem** had led to the mass destruction by the Roman army. Just 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, Rome marched through the holy land... scorching Galilee as they went. And finally ended up at the walls of Jerusalem.

There they eventually burned the temple to the ground. And there goes Jerusalem, one of the head quarters of the church.

In Rome, the church there didn't have it any better. There was a great fire throughout the city. The people began to blame the Emperor, emperor Nero. And so, Nero did what politicians are good at. He stoked the fires of fear and suspicion, blaming the easiest target. At the time, that was Christians. Nero turned these strange Christians into scapegoats... leading to mass persecution of the Church

Things in Mark's world were a mess. And it was all too easy to brush aside any idea of calling or mission in this world. The church was struggling for survival. It was an incredibly dangerous world. And the only thing that made any sense at all was to either hide from it, or throw your hands up in the air and walk away from it.

And so Mark, Mark the pastor, begins to write the story Jesus... He's writing the gospel down and he's doing it such a beautiful and artful way to help us remember that this is nothing new. This has always been the context, this has always been the world that Jesus has called his followers to go out into.

“Remember,” Mark tells us, “all the suspicion surrounding Jesus... and Jesus’ rejection even by his own neighbors and childhood friends.” After a robust ministry of preaching and healing and announcing the good news, Jesus goes back to his hometown. And he sits down and begins to share this same news in the synagogue he grew up going to as a little boy there in Nazareth. You would think that if there were any place he could get a fair hearing it would be there... with the people that knew him.

But no. The suspicion is thick. The questions keep buzzing around the room and around town. **“Who does he think he is?”** they say. **“Looks like Jesus has gotten a little too big for his own britches.”**

The doubts and suspicion just build on themselves, the way rumors do. And because of it, Jesus’ own ministry there falls flat on its face. Their closed hearts and harsh words keep them at an arms distance from the life of God that wants to flow to them through Jesus. **“He was unable to do many miracles there... and He was appalled by their disbelief”** Mark writes... as he winks at his church in his time, and reminds them... they aren't the first ones to be rejected by their own neighbors and friends.

Then, right on the heels of that story, Mark tells us about Jesus sending out the disciples. Ironic, isn't it? I mean talk about throw the disciples to the wolves. Just imagine being Thaddeus... or Andrew, or one of the 12. You've got to be thinking, **“They didn't like you, Jesus. There's no way they are going to like me. Don't you have a better game plan than this?”**

Well, if Jesus had a plan B, he doesn't tell him. He just sends them out, with a whole lot of nothing. No bread, no bags, no money, the text says. They've got nothing but a walking stick and Jesus' blessing... and off they go... to preach what Jesus preached, and do what Jesus did.

That was the essence of this little mission trip. Remember that summary of Jesus' ministry back at the beginning of the gospel? Mark 1:15, Jesus came preaching, **"The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news."** And for 5 chapters we've been watching Jesus heal the sick, cast the darkness out of people's lives, and invite them into repentance. Now, here in chapter 6, the disciples are doing the same thing. They've watched Jesus do it. Now it's their turn.

Apparently this is God's great plan for redemption: Enact it in Jesus, so the world can see what it looks like. And then call the rest of us to go and do likewise.

This is the mission of the disciples,
those who walked with Jesus,
and those in Mark's time who have only heard second hand
accounts about Jesus,
and those in our time who only have ancient manuscripts.

We are called to do what Jesus did, and to share what Jesus shared. Of course, the church has often gotten distracted from that calling along the way... or neglected it for other matters... or even discarded it all together for more appealing endeavors. But the calling, the mission, has always remained the same: We are to go and share the good news, that the Kingdom of God, the dream of God, the life giving presence of God is at hand... the good news that calls for a change of heart and lives. And along the way, we're to be casting out the darkness, and healing the broken.

***In other words, we are to both speak with our mouths
and enact with our lives the good news.***

I know, that's not an easy task. Jesus knows it too. He knows all about the rejection that goes along with it, rejection at home, rejection from his friends, and rejection by the world.

And Mark knows it too. There is a great calling, but we're called into a messy and messed up world... where evil seems to win all too often. And so, right on the heels of sending out the disciples, Mark goes into a flash back... to John the Baptist... arrested by that wanna-be king, Herod. Mark interrupts the story he's been telling, to tell us the story of Herod's court and foolishness... where Herod's drunken whim, and his fearful pride is what led to John the Baptist's head on a platter.

It's pretty clear Mark's puts this flash back here on purpose. There's real artistry on Mark's part. He's reminding us that this is the context that the followers of Jesus are called to. This is what the world is going to be like. Don't forget.

It's a world where those drunk on power can terrorize,
a world where speaking the truth can wind you up in jail... or even a your
head on a platter.

a world where meaningless suffering seems to have no end,
a world of ***resistance and rejection***.

It's a world that doesn't make sense,
that is going to feel overwhelming,
and will make you want to give up before you start.

Mark knows this.

Jesus knows this. And yet, he calls us anyway. He sends us out anyway. And
maybe it's precisely because of this that Jesus sends the disciples out.

Maybe this is more than a word to the wise about how hard it will be in this
world. Maybe this is a ***profound reminder that the good news desperately needs to be
shared and enacted***... to push back against this kind of social system and politics.

Maybe this story of John's beheading is right here at the calling of the disciples so
that we'll remember just how important it is we go live out our calling...so that we'll
remember just how important it is that we invite the world to changed hearts and lives.
Because if we don't, there will always be ***another Herod***, too fearful and too prideful, too
blinded by his own ego, to do what he knows is right... And there will always be ***another
Nero***, using fear and suspicion for political gain, scapegoating the outsider, the easiest
target in town.

I know. This calling of ours is a tall order for the church. And the real kicker is
that Jesus doesn't even send them all out together as one group. He won't let them hide in
group-think. Nope. They go two-by-two. They're scattered out all over the place... to
embody Jesus' ministry wherever they find themselves.

Of course, that's exactly what happens here each week. We gather to encounter
Christ, to remember the gospel. And then we're sent out. It's out there, in the sphere of
our daily lives that we're being sent as God's messengers.

You're sent into your school,
into your office,
into your daily grind...
into your family.

You are sent without much but the blessing of Christ and the staff of the gospel to
lean on. But you're sent to enact the good news: "The Kingdom of God is at hand,"
...the good news: "The Love of God is holding you and given for you."

There is good news that needs to be shared:

the good news: You are known by God and loved by Christ.

the good news: Darkness will not have the last word, not in our world,

and it doesn't have to have the last word in your life.

the good news: there is healing and hope in Christ.

You're sent to enact it... to live it out, the good news that there is a forgiveness of sins... there is a divine mercy that is offered to you... if you'll but open yourself to receive it.

We're called to speak those truths

and to live out those truths... to embody them, even in a world that resists and rejects Jesus and serves up John's head on a platter.

So, Dayspring, don't be overwhelmed by the litany of darkness you hear on the evening news. And don't let your own skepticism shut you down and close you off. Don't allow the hatred and fear of those who are different, to go unchecked.

In your conversations around the dinner table

and around the card table,

and around the conference table...

In your conversations around the office and around your school...

And even those conversations going on inside your own heart...

don't let fear and suspicion have the last word.

We have been sent with good news. No, maybe that good news won't always be welcomed news. But ***we have been sent*** to offer healing and hope,

to cast out the darkness...

and to invite the world to changed hearts and lives.

Of course, in order to live that out, ... it means that first and foremost we need changed hearts and lives ourselves. We can't offer what we haven't experienced. Without the transforming life of God working in us, our words are more likely to become patrician bickering than gospel truth... and our lives become more performance driven, than lives drawn by the Spirit.

A few years ago I shared with you the best definition of mission I've heard. It comes from a friend of mine, Dr. Mike Stroope. Mike was a teacher and friend who took me to Morocco. He took Jessi and me to India. Mike has spent his life thinking about and living out the mission of God in the world. And here's what he says being missional is:

Being transformed [yourself], while helping others to be transformed.

Remember, this morning we're still in the first half of the gospel of Mark. The disciples still have a long ways to go... just like you and I. But Jesus doesn't wait until all their questions are answered. He doesn't wait until they stop making fools of themselves.

He sends them out now... because living out their calling in the world is part of the journey for them. It's part of what shapes them and molds them. It's part of their spiritual work, just like it is ours.

In fact, something happens to them along the way. When they get back in vs. 30, for the first time the ***Disciples*** are called ***Apostles***. Something's happened. They've changed along the way. It's the mission where they are ***being transformed, while helping others to be transformed.***

Dayspring, let's not shy away from our great calling in the world. As a church, as individuals sent out... may we become more and more like Christ... and may we have the courage to speak and to live-out the good news of Christ, wherever we may be found.

Along the way,
may it be transforming us,
and making us whole.

Amen.

Reflection

*The Spirit is given so that we ordinary mortals can become,
in a measure, what Jesus himself was:
part of God's future arriving in the present;
a place where heaven and earth meet;
the means of God's kingdom going ahead.*
~N. T. Wright