

Proper 10 in Year B, July 11, 2021
Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta, GA
The Rev. Dr. James C. Pace

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Today's Gospel from Mark gives us a snapshot of Jesus midway into his ministry. He sends out the 12 in pairs to proclaim the Kingdom and prepare people to receive Him. We have this rich interplay between those who are to proclaim the Good News about Jesus together with the work that it takes to follow him.

The process adopted by Jesus is worth noting. Firstly, his disciples spent time with Jesus to observe his approach and to a certain extent, were personally involved in these activities. Jesus now takes it a step further in their formation: he gave them responsibility to act without His being present. Though Jesus trusted his disciples, they were not completely ready for mission as they had much to learn. Their formation could happen only through their actions and the questions and answers that would evolve. This was a process that spoke to the power of their experiences. It seems to be a part of the human condition that learning occurs in the process of doing, practicing, and boldly stumbling forward.

Another aspect of the Kingdom is the realization that imperfection does not disqualify us from the work we have to do. As a matter of fact, imperfection leads to further growth and responsibilities from lessons learned. They were to engage with, to name, and to confront the evil of their world with the life-changing power of Jesus. Jesus shared with them His authority and His life. Jesus had confronted untruth with truth, violence with respect and love, and now they were to do the same.

Jesus sent them out two by two for good reason. When accompanied by another, one is never alone when the power of evil embedded in the world becomes threatening. Working

together was also a visible example of community. Community draws people out of alienation and marginalization and allows a sharing of vision and active cooperation.

The disciples were to travel without material goods and were to rely on the hospitality of strangers. The medium was the message. The God of the Kingdom was one who gave plenteously and God's people were to live in line with their own and each other's inherent human dignity. To rely on God was to live out their faith in God and if people did not see that message, they did not understand the essence of the Kingdom.

There was also a sense of urgency. They were not to waste time waiting for a delayed change of heart in those they met. People either saw the evil that needed to be confronted or else they themselves were a part of the problem. The gesture of shaking the dust off of one's feet was a cultural way of showing disdain. In other words, if the recipients of the message didn't get it, forget about them and move on.

Jesus had made no previous mention of anointing with oil or of healing the sick. Herein is found the mission to bring the sick and the stigmatized back to a state of self-respect and integration of life within the community. These actions paralleled the confrontation with evil and the casting out of demons, and, as with Jesus Himself, exemplified other important aspects of the Kingdom. Jesus sends them forth to preach repentance meaning a radical change of one's heart. He also sends them forth to heal the sick and to cast out evil.

What does all this mean for us? First. We are to re-present. We are to *REPRESENT* the same loving actions of Jesus, as did the 12, first to ourselves, and then to others. The best way to live the Christian life is to simply relate the healing actions of Jesus in simple yet profound ways. On the one hand, we are called to be a Good Samaritan on life's roadside. But that is only the beginning. As we mature, we come to realize that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed

so that men and women will not constantly be robbed and beaten as they make their way forward in life. True compassion is more than simply one episode of kindness. True compassion is coming to see that an edifice which produces injustice is an edifice that itself needs to be restructured.

Now, if you will forgive me, I am going to preach to myself for just a minute. If you want, you may listen in, but this is something I really need to hear. ***Jim Pace***: What this passage says to you is that even though you are now 67 years old, you still don't get it. *Shake off the dust*. Don't get hung up on what is in the past. If you have done or said or will do or say something stupid, learn from it. Apologize when necessary. And then move on. But don't let that stupid something dominate your thoughts and your life over and over again. It keeps you from moving forward. Be done with it. Shake off the dust. Let the burden slide off your back. The slate has been cleaned in Christ Jesus and in Him you are healed and restored. That is what belief in Jesus is all about. Learn and love and then move on. *Clear on that, Jim Pace?*

Ok. Now I'm back with you. Thank you for that. I needed to hear that. Because I needed to hear once again, that I need to concentrate on actions that truly reveal the Kingdom of God to myself and to others and not get bogged down by my failures. Here we are today sitting in multiple pairs of disciples in these pews. We are a community that is to listen to the Word of God because it heals and strengthens us. It tells us that we are worthy. It reminds us that we are human and need God, always. There is a magnificent Prayer of Thanksgiving found in the BCP on page 836 of the BCP, please allow me to quote two important lines:

Accept O Lord my thanks for setting us at tasks with demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

We are not perfect and we will never be! That is why we have Jesus. That's the good news for today. And when we represent this reality, first to self, and then to others, the Kingdom of God is present among us and is doing its work of transfiguration. When we are able to move on and be done with those things that weigh us down, we live the Word of God. We discover this Word when the Gospel is proclaimed and preached, when the Altar is set, and when we eat and drink of the true presence of Christ our Lord who sends us forth to represent just that: Christ's healing, transfiguring presence.

Allow me to close with this beautiful verse from our Psalm today that sums it all up: I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, for he is speaking peace to those who turn their hearts to Him ... truth shall spring up from the earth when mercy and truth meet together, and then righteousness and peace will find each other to kiss.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the **Holy Spirit. Amen.**