

## “Let’s Take This Thing on the Road”

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Mark 6:7-12*

We are in chapter 6 of Mark.

After witnessing a long series of healings,

after hearing and being formed by a series of teachings

on Jesus as Bridegroom, on Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath

on the kingdom and on faith,

after witnessing Jesus be rejected by His own (last week’s gospel),

the Apostles are ready to be sent on mission.

Let us underscore “ready”, for how ready can one be for such a mission....?

It can be likened unto finishing college or a special training program

and being thrust into career or new work responsibilities.

Apparently, for Jesus, the Apostles have finished

—or at least have had sufficient—schooling for apostleship.

Jesus summons the Twelve and begins to send them.

What is interesting to note are the *details* of their mission,

some of which differ from the other gospels.

In Matthew, for example, it is not said that the Apostles are sent in pairs.

In Matthew, for example, they are *not* to wear sandals.

The differences are not an issue, however

—not because the details are unimportant,

but because each, in context, reveal different, complementary things.

What *is* revealed about

- discipleship
- being sent by Jesus
- the mission of those who belong to Christ?

What are the details, the instructions for the journey?

1. They are sent two by two.

Why?

It cannot simply be for security or morale reasons:

to keep each other safe and upbeat.

If it were for security reasons, Jesus would not propose what follows:

the list of things *not* to bring on the journey

—which, of course, leave any normal person feeling insecure.

Jesus sends the Apostles in pairs  
perhaps because of that to which they are to witness: *divine love*.  
The most eloquent and powerful testimony that they are to give  
is *the love that indwells them*  
and enables them to receive and care for one another as Brothers.

2. They are given authority over unclean spirits.  
This, in a sense, further expresses the primacy of such fraternal love.  
The unclean spirits may be demons.  
But, in the broader sense, they represent anything contrary to love.  
The Apostles have a love that is more powerful than anything...

3. They are to take nothing, save a walking stick and sandals.  
Most of us consider ourselves disciples of Jesus.  
What if we were to apply this strictly?  
I personally would probably not be able to refrain from saying to Jesus:  
“Thank you for the walking stick, but I don’t really need it.  
I can walk just fine. I’ll take the food.”  
If we applied this strictly,  
my guess is that we would be witnessing widespread panic attacks.  
Seriously: imagine being sent on mission, for an indefinite period of time,  
with no food, no money, no toothbrush (!).  
Come on ladies: I’ve seen you panic when you can’t find your purse!  
Gentlemen: I’ve seen you panic when you can’t find the remote control!  
No remote for the journey; no cell phone, no Ipod.  
Only a walking stick and sandals.  
It is quite amazing when one really thinks about it.  
It is not an episode of “Survivor”. It is not “Boot Camp”.  
It is an invitation to dependence, dependence on Jesus.  
The love and the light that the Apostles are to communicate  
*come from Jesus*: Jesus, light of the world, Jesus, love of the world.

The Apostles are sent forth as *instruments* of God,  
not to do their own thing in imitation of God.  
A good instrument is a *docile* instrument, i.e. available to its user.  
A docile disciple is available to Jesus.  
The docility of a disciple is a deliberate docility.  
We *choose* to be dependent  
—not in a dysfunctional way, but a deep, loving way.  
It is an attitude of total openness and responsible trust.

It is not psychological regression  
(leading back to the helplessness of the crib).

The Apostles were bold, yet deliberately vulnerable,  
asked by Jesus to

- trust Him even for their food
- let Him feed them through whomever He wished along the way.

The Apostles are sent to love and enlighten:

- wearing sandals, for the journey was long
- carrying a walking stick of reminiscent of the shepherd's staff
- respectfully staying whenever they are welcomed, and moving on when not welcomed, "shaking the dust off their feet in testimony, underscoring the importance of hospitality.

They preach and exorcise demons and anoint and heal the sick.

These are three of the ten works of mercy  
that the Church has discerned we are sent forth to do.

There are many real questions that arise from this for us:

- Do we even believe that God would like to work through us?
- Do we believe that God is *able* to work through us?
- If we struggle to believe this, do we at least simply say it?
- Do we make ourselves available to the Lord,  
surrendering even our ugly baggage?
- Do we trust that Jesus can be our food, our clothing and our shelter?

So much awaits us if only we let go: wonders in us and wonders through us.

How wonder-full!

Let us be full of wonder.