

Missionary, Travel Light with Jesus!

Mark 6:7–13 (NIV) ⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. ⁸ These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹ 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.” ¹² They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

In Christ Jesus, who sends out workers into his harvest field, dear fellow redeemed,

I consider it one of the great privileges in my ministry to be able to participate in the assignment of our synod’s newest called workers to their first field of service. It is such a joy to see and hear their excitement as, after years of training, these brothers and sisters in Christ receive a divine call and finally know where it is that they will begin their public ministry.

Soon after the assignments are made, I have the opportunity to meet with the called workers newly assigned to our Northern Wisconsin District of WELS. This year at the seminary, five men were assigned to our district – four who will serve here in Wisconsin, and one pastor, Mark Zondag, for whom our district, in fact our congregation, will serve as his “home base,” if you will, as he and his wife Sarah and their two daughters prepare to travel to Thailand, where Pastor Zondag will serve as a world missionary on our Asia One Team, a mission effort overseen by our own Pastor Raasch.

When I meet with the newly assigned pastors, after offering some general instructions to the group, I then make the rounds, visiting with each couple about the call they’ve received. I let know if there’s a parsonage provided or if they are expected to purchase a house. That’s always a fun conversation as the couples begin to make plans about what they will need to buy to establish their home. But this year, when I got around to visiting with the Zondags, they were having a very different conversation. They were talking about all the things they would need to sell or store before they head overseas. They won’t take a car, or living room furniture, or even a bedroom set. They will take hardly anything at all. It’s not that they will live in poverty. But most of the things they will need, they will have to get in Thailand.

The Zondags’ circumstances remind me of the message that our Savior has for them and for all of us - this message: Missionary, Travel Light with Jesus! Go 1) in his name, 2) with his message, and 3) to his glory.

Our text begins, “**Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.**” (Mark 6:7). Missionaries need encouragement. So, Jesus sends out the Twelve in pairs, trusting that the members of each two-man team would encourage one another. Then, he gives each mission team authority over impure spirits and to heal the sick. Why would he do that?

If they hope to carry out their mission, missionaries need a good reputation. They need to be credible. Jesus doesn’t send these men out with the heavy responsibility of establishing their own credibility. They get to travel light. They get to go in Jesus’ name. For more than a year Jesus had been carrying out ministry. He was becoming known to the masses as one who proclaimed the coming of God’s kingdom. So that people would recognize and believe that one speaking to them

was none other than God's own Son, Jesus performed miracles – driving out demons, healing the sick, even raising the dead. By giving the Twelve authority to perform miracles in his name, the people would recognize the apostles and ambassadors of the Christ, proclaiming his saving message.

Jesus does the same sort of thing for us today. He says to us: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18–20.** With these words Jesus commissions all of us, the members of his church, together with our called workers, to serve as his missionaries. “Go!” Jesus says to you and me as he sends us out. By the way, our English word “missionary” means – “one who is sent out.” By his authority as the one true God, Jesus sends us out in his name. We're traveling light. We need not carry any other credentials. Why would we bother? We go as servants of the Most High God!

Does Jesus give us authority to drive out demons and heal the sick? He can, but generally speaking, he doesn't. Remember, Jesus used those miracles to introduce himself and his mission before the Christian Church came into existence on Pentecost. There is no need for such introductions now. Christ's church has long been established. While it's true that most people do not know the teachings of Christianity, they know it to be a major religion.

Still, wouldn't it be great to tap into Jesus' power and love, and with these at the ready do great things for those who are hurting and suffering? We can! We do! In fact, Jesus gives us the privilege of taking part in the greatest miracle of them all: **Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²²And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” (John 20:23).** Talk about authority! We forgive sins in Jesus' name! How do we do that? With the twitch of our nose or the snap of our fingers? No, this isn't magic. This is all done through the power of the gospel at work in God's Word and sacrament.

It's fantastic! When we go out in Jesus' name, we don't have to carry with us a suitcase full of doctrinal dissertations. We don't need a library full of religious books. Missionary, you get to travel light with Jesus. You go with his message – one that is so simple, and yet is packed with the very power of God! It's a message that transcends language and culture, a message that is for your next-door neighbor and for the people of Asia, for all people of all times and places. What is the message? Mark tells us that the Twelve, **“...went out and preached that people should repent.” (Mark 6:12).** Luke adds that Jesus **“...sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:2).**

I said the message is simple. But that doesn't mean it's something that people want to hear. Telling someone to repent means using God's commandments to show people that they are hell bound sinners who can do nothing whatsoever to help themselves into heaven. The commandments affirm that their troubled conscience has not been lying to them. The guilt they carry is real and heavier than they can possibly imagine. And the fear they feel toward God is the product of their sinfulness that separates them from his holiness. The news is damning.

But thanks be to the God, the message we believe and share does not end with the commandments. Repentance means turning from sin to Christ in faith. Proclaiming the “kingdom of God” means proclaiming all that his grace has done for us and all sinners. In love we don't deserve, God sent Jesus to claim the baggage of our sin as his own, to carry our sin-guilt to the cross, and in our place, to be crushed under the weight of God's anger in hell until the world's sin was paid for. In love we could never earn, Jesus took it all and suffered it all as our Substitute. Then, he rose from the dead to prove that we are forever free from sin's power, sin's guilt, and sin's curse. Because he lives, we live forever at peace with God in his care and keeping.

The Twelve were to preach this life-giving message with their words and by their actions. This is why Jesus told them: **“Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.” (Mark 6:8-10).** Those who say “trust Christ” in all things, must, themselves, trust Christ in all things so that they do not cause others to doubt their message. As the Twelve carried out their mission they could travel light, counting on Jesus to provide all their needs physical, emotional, and spiritual. Jesus would do this, in part, through the generosity of those who believed their message. For this reason, when the disciples were welcomed into a home, they were to stay put. They weren’t to leave that place if and when a better offer came along from someone with more money or a higher standing in the community.

We modern missionaries are to be just as careful that we do not put stumbling blocks in front those we serve with the gospel. How confusing it would be to people if we say that Christ is the most important thing in life but then worry or fret because we don’t have enough money, or better health, or more friends. How perplexing if we say that Jesus means everything to us, but then spend our time chasing after the world’s treasures and pleasures. How frustrating if we say that Jesus is the Savior of all, but then share the gospel only with those who look and talk like us. What should people conclude? That we are hypocrites? Quite possibly. But far worse, they may decide that our message is worthless, and so remain lost to Jesus who loves them so.

I’ve been urging you to travel light, but I suspect these last thoughts might prove to be a bit too heavy to bear. How can we, sinners that we are, hope to be perfect missionaries? We can’t. We aren’t and won’t be perfect. So, what will we do? We’ll practice what we preach. We’ll confess our sin before God and neighbor. We’ll take our burden to the cross and there receive God’s full forgiveness. Then, relieved of all guilt and fear, we’ll go back to work. We’ll take our message to the next needy soul, and the next. But what if they won’t listen despite all of our efforts?

Jesus has something to say about that too: **“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.” Mark 6:11.** I suppose the Savior’s words might sound a bit harsh to our western ears. But the One who died to save these people isn’t giving up on them. There is simply a reality to mission work. The gospel seed has been planted. If there is no immediate fruit to tend, the missionary must keep going. There are so many other lost souls to reach and only so much time in which to reach them. By shaking the dust of their feet, the disciples are offering a loving warning. In effect they are saying: “We came to bring you life everlasting. We want and are taking nothing from you – not even your dust. Our motives are pure and our message is the different between life and death. Think about it!”

That’s all we missionaries can do whether it’s here in Appleton or in Asia. It’s not our job to make believers out of people. That’s God’s work. He’ll do the heavy lifting. We travel light with Jesus, to his glory. By that I simply mean that no matter what happens in the mission field, when we proclaim Christ’s saving gospel, his purpose is served, and his name is honored. What happens next is up to Jesus. Mark tells us that the Twelve **“...drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” Mark 6:13.** Jesus blessed their work. He’ll bless your work too because it pleases him to do so. He has given himself to rescue us and the all the people of our world. He wants all to be saved, so he sends all of us on a mission. He wants all to believe, so he sends us with a gospel so powerful, that it has saved even us, stubborn sinners that we are. Don’t you see? Nothing on earth or even in hell itself, can stop Jesus from blessing us and the work he’s given us to do. So, go, dear Missionary. Travel light with Jesus – in his name, with his message, to his glory. Amen.