

## Jesus sends the twelve

February 9, 2020

I want us to think about mission today. What does it mean for us to share the good news of the God we know in Jesus the Christ? Joe from the Gideons used to visit us about this time of the year, and he would tell stories of how God had used Gideon Bibles to bring people to faith. The only translation the Gideons use is the King James Version of the Bible, and it is beautiful poetry, but the language might seem stilted to post-modern readers.

I did a little research into Bible translations this week. I discovered that someone has translated the Bible into Klingon, for you Star Trek fans, actually for you Klingons, or for the next time you meet one. There is also a version in Patwois, another name for Jamaican. So in Patwois, instead of the angel saying to Mary, Rejoice, rejoice, o highly favored one, the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women, the translation is, De angel go to Mary and say to 'er, me have news we going to make you well 'appy. God really, really bless you and him a walk with you all de time.

Or maybe you want to give someone a Bible, but they don't have a very long attention span. Someone has written a Bible that is just 500 pages long. Here's the creation story from Genesis- "First off, nothing. No light, no time, no substance, no matter. Second off, God starts it all off and WHAP! Stuff everywhere. The cosmos in chaos." I kind of like that one.

Here's the question I want us to think about today- What does mission look like in the 21st century? Does it just mean giving people Bibles they can understand? How do we tell the story of Jesus to people who think they've already heard it, or to people who think the church is anti-gay and judgmental? And by the way, I appreciate that saying- You might be the only Bible someone reads. What will people think about Jesus by looking at our lives?

In our gospel lesson today from Mark 6, we get some clues as to how to be faithful in telling the good news of Jesus. In the first part of the story, Jesus comes home and meets disbelief from his former neighbors. They've heard of some of the miracles he has done, but then they say, But we watched him grow up. This is just Jesus. Isn't this Mary's son? We know his family, we know his history, he can't be anything special.

And do you notice that when they mention his family, they don't mention Joseph? They don't mention his father. There were some strange rumors about the birth of Jesus. There was some scandal involving who his father was. So they don't even mention Joseph's name. They think, "Certainly anybody who has a scandalous history can't do anything special." And maybe because they are skeptical of Jesus, he isn't able to do much. They don't have enough faith for much to happen.

Now, God is able to accomplish things when we don't have much faith. God is not just dependent on our faith. But it looks like we can inhibit God's work in the world because of our lack of faith. Maybe we don't really believe God can work in a certain situation, and so we hinder God's work. Maybe we think some relationship will never change, and so it doesn't. And yet, all God calls us to do is to cast the seed, to throw it out there. Jesus says, you don't need a lot of faith; with faith the size of a mustard seed, God can do great things.

I love St. Paul's realism when he says this about reconciling relationships in Romans 12:18, If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Paul doesn't say you will be able to succeed at all times in maintaining peaceful relationships, he says, as far it depends on you. You do your part, with the faith you have, to reconcile relationships.

Jesus shows up in his hometown, and he isn't able to do much, because they are so skeptical of him. They lack faith. I wonder what challenge we might give to God today, with as much faith as we have?

Then Jesus says, we need to cast the seed wider. So he says to his twelve followers, I'm going to send you out, two by two. By the way, I wonder who he paired up with whom. One of the twelve was Levi, the former tax collector. Maybe whoever he got sent out with wasn't really happy traveling with someone who had been collecting taxes for the Romans. Maybe Jesus paired him up with Simon the Zealot, who was a part of a group that assassinated Roman soldiers and officials. That's a crazy team—a guy who had been supporting the occupiers, and a guy who had been trying to overthrow them. Maybe Jesus said, you two talk it out on the road. I need you both.

And Jesus sends them out and says, Don't take much with you. Why do you suppose that was? Because he wanted them to have faith that they would be taken care of along the way. God would provide. And he wanted them to rely on strangers.

He says, Go to a house and stay there. Don't get antsy and look for better accommodations. Receive hospitality from those people.

Now I know that there weren't churches then for the disciples to invite people to. So they had to go out and share the good news. But I wonder if over the centuries we have turned this inside out, so that we invite people to come to our place now. We provide the hospitality. Come check out our worship service. See how good our coffee hour is, or our youth group. But Jesus originally said, You go out. Let strangers provide hospitality to you. Go eat their food, go hear their stories, go watch the games their children play.

Now, over the centuries, when the church has lived this out, we don't always have a great track record. Even when we went out to other people, we brought our culture with us. Christian churches sent missionaries to Indian reservations, where Native youth were taken from their homes, were given white names and haircuts, and were beaten if they spoke their language. All in the name of sharing the good news of Jesus with them. That was so contrary to the spirit of Jesus, who said, Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Jesus says, When you go, receive hospitality from others, listen to their stories, get to know them. God has already been at work in their lives. What stories do they have to tell you? How can you in humility listen more than you speak? I think we have sometimes had the view that we are bringing God to people. The Spirit is already at work in people's lives. We are joining the conversation.

Recently we went out to eat with some folks we didn't know very well, and they brought some friends that we didn't know at all. At one point in the conversation I mentioned that I am a pastor. It was just a passing reference about the kinds of conversations I get into. After a moment or two, one of the women came back to that, and said, So you're a pastor. What do you do with those passages in the Bible that are against gay people?

That question gave me an opportunity to do some interpretation of scripture. I mentioned John Wesley's quadrilateral, where he says we can use tradition and reason and experience to interpret the Bible. I explained that it's only been 100 years since we discovered that people have a sexual orientation. The sciences keep giving us more and more clues about how complicated our sexuality is. We can bring science back to scripture, and ask, How does our new knowledge inform whether or not this passage is relevant to our lives?

And then Wesley said we can bring our experience to scripture. We know people in our lives who don't fit into binary categories. That is part of our experience. We bring that psychology and the experience of our relationships back to scripture to ask, how do we better understand these passages for our times?

I shared that our church went through a conversation and that we are a welcoming and affirming community. Her experience in the church has been so contrary to that.

I asked her to tell me of her experience in the church, and I listened to her tell her story of life in two very narrow theological traditions.

When we parted ways, her husband said he was so glad to hear that there are churches that are rethinking things, churches with a wider theology.

I only share that because I had an opportunity to be in conversation with someone about the faith. She genuinely wanted my opinion on something that concerned her. I was able to share my understanding of scripture, that came out of her curiosity. And I asked her about her story. It was a mutual conversation.

Jesus says to the twelve, Go out and listen. Go out and hear people's stories. Go out and be curious about people. Go out and realize I've already been at work. Now, they won't always receive what you have to offer. Sometimes you'll just need to move on. But go and listen and hear stories and listen in love and humility, and plant some seeds. God brings the harvest.

We're going to start a three-week conversation today about how to best be stewards of our property, and that doesn't mean just the land, but it means our building. We'll do some listening about what the needs are in our community. I heard an AARP survey a couple years ago that said that one-third of seniors over 45 are chronically lonely- how could we offer more outreach to our seniors and their friends? How could we use our building for that? Maybe we do some programming outside the building.

And here's another need- I don't know if this figure has changed, but a couple years ago half of the babies born to women under thirty were outside of marriage. I don't say that as a moral judgment. But it means there are a bunch of single moms around who are raising kids. How could we reach out in terms of childcare or mentoring or big brother- big sister-ing?

As we go out and listen, what are the stories we will hear? Where is God already at work? Where is there energy? Again, we just scatter the seed. That's our job. But let's really fling it out there. Let's take some risks for the sake of the gospel. And then we'll trust God to do what God wants to do. Amen.