

When my brother Mark was a teenager, he went out as part of a youth group trip to teach Vacation Bible School in Mexico. He would have been upfront with you that he was not going out as a disciple of Jesus, but someone who wanted to do some good and have some fun.

Church is not just another volunteer organization trying to do good, where we volunteer when we want to. The church is a community of people called by God and sent by Christ. It is by his decision not ours that we become an extension of his ministry. We are gathered into a church to be formed as disciples. Jesus makes clear the purpose of being disciples is to be sent out, to become apostles. (Apostle means sent one in Greek.) We try to follow. We try to be disciples, but we fail repeatedly. How does he dare send us out? How do we dare to go? How can anything good happen?

It was in going out to serve Jesus that Mark was forced to consider what he believed. In going out he discovered faith. Jesus doesn't wait for full understanding or admirable discipline before choosing and sending us, even those of us who are not sure about discipleship.

Jesus had just been rejected by those in his hometown. So he goes out among the villages teaching. He couldn't be in every place so he called his disciples. He didn't ask for volunteers. He sent them out to villages in pairs to preach and heal. Jesus sent them on a 'particular' mission.

They weren't to follow Jesus. They were sent out with his authority, as an extension of his ministry. They were to take no baggage, nothing that could make them an authority. They couldn't take money or extra clothes or food. This put them in the vulnerable position of relying on God and on others. They had nothing to offer but the message and healing authority of Jesus.

We usually think about how more money, more resources could help us do a better job of ministry. While it is not wrong to use extra clothing, or food or money to serve God, we rely on those things rather than the authority Jesus gives us. Baggage easily encumbers us in our mission. Without those resources we are forced to rely on God. We have to risk to offer ourselves, to go out and encounter people. We can't just give them some thing or let money do the work. Consider this story. A large congregation sent a box of donations. Written in marker on the cardboard box were the words, "for the homeless." The box was opened and it was filled with microwave popcorn. "My first instinct was to laugh. We barely

had electricity, much less a microwave, and popcorn wasn't on the top of the needs list. My second instinct was to cry because of how far the church had become removed from the poor."¹

Are we building a church to protect ourselves and our faith, a church that helps others out of our excess? Or are we building a community of disciples that goes out into the larger community learning how to offer ourselves, constantly living out faith in all of life for others?

The disciples went out with a mission, but needed help to sustain it. They were told to find a place to stay and not move around. They would have to be among those to whom Jesus was sending them to minister. Their concern was to receive hospitality more than to have their preferences met. Energy was to be focused on the mission of communicating God's kingdom, not just finding better accommodations. They only move on when someone will not listen to gospel.

God sends us on his mission to communicate his kingdom. We may even need someone who doesn't yet believe to support the mission. As disciples we must consider is our energy focused on finding better accommodations: Like just the right person to share the gospel with or making sure every single thing is in order in our life before we show the life of faith. We offer our testimony by word and deed and trust God to work.

This mission is marked by humble persistence. You get a hearing by any means, yet we don't force ourselves on those unwilling to hear. Sometimes people need to discover for themselves, constant pressure and correction will not work. Knowing when to move on is important. Our job is not to persuade those who refuse (a relief), but to give them a chance to see and hear about Jesus at work. We don't beat ourselves up sharing with someone who does not want to listen. On the other hand, it is not just okay that they didn't listen. When we walk away there is a formal disavowal of fellowship.

This brings us to the point of action. The first flawed 12 disciples went out in obedience. They acted. They proclaimed that all should repent; they cast out demons; they anointed the sick and cured them. Jesus didn't just pick 12 guys to pour benefits into. He chose them to shape them to serve. They went out and through them the authority of Christ became effective and operative.

As we in the church go out the ministry of Christ is made real and helped to be recognized. Do we think this is possible, to go out, to make the ministry of Christ real and to help it be recognized? (I ask this because I am constantly struggling with how do I translate the gospel into everyday life outside the church.)

Rev. Bell the first minister here took a Sunday school (what God was already doing) and helped it become a church. Then he had people from the new church (Bell Memorial) go to Koppel to share about what God was doing. Our church wasn't just founded as a place of learning, but of engagement with the community. Disciples became apostles (sent ones.)

Remarkable ministry still comes through the obedience of inadequate messengers. Often we work in elaborate ways to dismiss this call of Jesus which is at the core of our faith. We want to speak about anything else than what we believe about God and what he is doing.

Ron Sider of Evangelicals for Social Action says, “ I’m afraid that a great deal of the American Church, including a great deal of the evangelical Church, is really lukewarm, half-hearted and fundamentally disobedient to Christ. My one deepest longing would be that all parts of the Church would repent and turn away from its lukewarm, half-hearted attitude and decide we’re committed to Jesus Christ. Above everything else, He’s the absolute center and we’re going to obey Him, no matter what the culture says—He’s going to be the center of our whole lives. If the Church would do that, we’d see revival, renewal and drastic change.”ⁱⁱ

We may be anxious about going out, but this is part of the claim God lays on his disciples. Faith reminds us of the authority given by Jesus to proclaim, to heal, to claim victory over evil.

Jesus sends us out. Let us go out speaking in love from the heart unashamed. Let us go out acting in ways that heal and bring hope of release from evil. That people will know that Jesus is Lord through our words and actions. What will you do to make his kingdom known in the next two week until we meet again?

ⁱ Claiborne, Shane *The Irresistible Revolution*, 63

ⁱⁱ <http://www.neueministry.com/2009/06/the-need-for-social-action-an-interview-with-ron-sider/> viewed 6-25-09