

CHRIST REDEEMER EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Trumbull, Connecticut

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – July 26, 2009

Sermon by Pastor Paul M. Meier

“CHRIST SENDS US ON A MISSION TRIP”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. [Read the sermon text, Mark 6:7-13.]

In the name of Jesus, the Head of the Church and our Motivation for ministry, dear friends:

Summer is the time for vacations. Just take a look around you, and by glancing at the empty pews you know that this person is away on vacation, or that family is off on a trip.

When going on vacation, we usually do quite a bit of advanced planning before setting out. We select a destination, make reservations, and set an itinerary. We identify places of interest along the way; we designate a certain portion of the family budget for travel, lodging, meals and other expenses. Certainly we make sure people we are visiting will be home when we arrive.

The trip on which Jesus sent His twelve disciples in today’s Gospel Lesson was a little different from a family vacation. Yet it closely compares to our faith-life. We can definitely say that CHRIST SENDS US ON A MISSION TRIP. Notice how it’s like the disciples’ mission trip in our text.

I. We have company along the way

First, it’s a trip where we have company along the way. Notice in the first verse of our text that Jesus sent the disciples out **“two by two”** (7). This is for the primary purpose of support.

People can go on vacation all by themselves, and they can have a wonderful time. But the one thing they lack is that they have no one with whom to share the experience, no one to have a deep conversation with about what they saw on the trip.

On our mission journeys through life, some opportunities will pop up unexpectedly, and we will have to handle them all by ourselves. And that’s fine; we can do all things through Christ, who gives us strength. But isn’t it a far better and much more enjoyable experience when we can have a fellow Christian there beside us, together trekking forth on this witnessing opportunity? Oh, sure, if we have to witness alone, afterwards we can discuss the conversation with a Christian brother or sister so that we can receive encouragement for what we’ve done, and perhaps get some pointers on how to answer this question or counter that argument. But to have someone you know, someone you trust, someone who is like-minded in faith right by your side, then you don’t feel so alone, you’re not as afraid to proclaim the gospel, and together you can tag-team your responses, complementing the other’s gifts with your own. After all, Jesus had His disciples; the disciples had each other; Paul had Barnabas, and later Silas, Luke and Timothy; Aquila had his wife, Priscilla; the list can go on and on. The point is: two souls are better than one.

That’s one of the reasons why we encourage everyone to stay for fellowship after church as well as Bible class. There you can establish true Christian relationships. There you can ask your questions about the Bible and get wonderful responses from fellow Christians. There you can get encouragement and support to carry on your mission trip. But, as good as this support is, there’s one even better. **“Where two or three come together in my name,”** Jesus assures us, **“there am I with them”** (Matthew 18:20). Jesus joins us on our missionary journey through life!

II. We pack light but right

Secondly, on our mission trip we pack light but right. Very few people would set out on a trip without taking at least the bare essentials. If you were packing for a ski trip in the mountains, you would pack far differently than if you were planning a week at the beach. Most people would not even think of going off somewhere for an extended stay without all the appropriate provisions. But here Jesus instructs His disciples to ***“take nothing for the journey except a staff”*** (8). This was neither intended to ignore their daily needs, nor to be a mandate for all future missionary trips. But on this particular occasion, in this particular setting, there is something that Jesus wishes for His disciples to learn: they must be totally dependent upon Him. The One who sends them out will provide them with what they need.

When God does not seem to equip us as richly in material things as we'd like, perhaps He is equipping us to trust solely in Him—and not on anything else.

Yet there is one thing with which we must always be equipped on our mission trips, one thing we must never leave home without. We must always have the Word of God. The disciples were given the commission of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit, the power of God's Word, and a walking stick. Minus the walking stick, we are given much the same, and the Word that Christ by His cross has redeemed us—that Word proclaimed among us, poured over us, fed to us, all then to be shared by us—*that* sustains us on our spiritual journey through life.

That is why weekly worship and Bible class are so important. That is why for membership we take confirmation students through years of intensive classes, and adults through months of doctrinal study. That is why we provide you with daily devotions through the *Meditations* booklets. That's why our synod has a daily devotional online to which you can subscribe free of charge. That's why we

offer you an church library. That's why we offer a women's group, youth group, Bible studies and are even willing to offer more opportunities. You need to be—and we want you to be—thoroughly equipped for every good work of proclaiming the gospel.

You may think you're ill equipped to share God's Word. Is it because you haven't spent as much time with God's Word, as you would have liked? Is it because you haven't practiced what you plan to preach all that much and would like a fellow Christian to practice on and share with you words of advice and encouragement? Is it because you are afraid to speak up about your faith? Your pastor can help you. Your church leaders can help you. Your fellow brothers and sisters at Faith can help you. We're all in this together. We may not have the resources of a “mega-church”, but what we got is the right stuff. As the children's song puts it: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the *Bible* tells me so.”

III. We bring back memorable results

Finally, following our mission trip we bring back memorable results. A family sets out on a vacation with high expectations—at least the parents do—that it will be great family time together. Usually it is. But not every thrill is experienced by all ages equally. A stop at an historic location may be Mom and Dad's “Wow!” but not the teenager's. Those long hours in the car may not *all* turn out to be quality bonding time. On the other hand, there will surely be moments of enjoyment that create memories no one could have anticipated.

In our text, Jesus doesn't offer an idealistic description of what the disciples can expect on their trip. In fact, He's very up front and admits there will likely be places that will not welcome them or listen. When that happens, they're not to let it squelch their continued journey, but to ***“shake the dust off [their] feet”*** (11) and move on. In ministry and discipleship, people's reception of God's

Word will not always be favorable. They may be cool and condescending to your message. They may be complacent or apathetic. They may even be downright hostile to you. It happens. It happened to Jesus. It happened to His disciples. It happens to you and to me.

Nevertheless, there will be times, Jesus assures us, when people's reception to the good news will be favorable. As the Lord had commissioned them, the disciples ***"drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them"*** (12). These miracles were proofs that their motives and their message were pure. They were tangible demonstrations of the restoration of all things that Jesus would work by His inglorious death and victorious resurrection. Satan is overcome; spiritual health is restored when God and man are reconciled. We may see different demonstrations of God's marvelous works as we go about communicating the message of Christ. But God's power is just as mighty, and the message of repentance and trust in the forgiveness Jesus offers is just as gracious.

Whether or not we always feel comfortable giving witness to our faith in daily words and actions, we never know what impact might result from the Lord's work through us. In Isaiah we are told, ***"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth... so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"*** (Isaiah 55:10-11). As difficult as it feels when you're not met with immediate acceptance, the Lord can use your witness in a person's life at some point in the future, even if you're not the one who witnesses that fruitful response. The Word of God does perform its function to bring people to repentance and receive the good news of God's uncompromising mercy for them in Christ Jesus, just as it does in each worship service as Confession and

Absolution take place, as the Word is proclaimed, and as the Sacraments are administered.

Whether or not we take a vacation this summer, every day can contain opportunities for Christ to send you on a mission trip—from chatting around the water cooler at work to a conversation with a family member on the living room sofa to an email exchange with a friend on the internet. Through these opportunities, which may not appear all that special, the Lord is able to do far more than we can ever foresee. Jesus demonstrated that to His disciples in our text. And He demonstrates it to us, as we journey through this life, receiving and sharing the Gospel message. Come, hear Christ's call, and go where He shall lead. Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the true faith to life everlasting. Amen.