

July 8, 2018 • Youth Service Project Commissioning

“Sent”

Sermon by the Rev. Patricia Farris

Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Yesterday, on a very hot Saturday, a dozen hardy folks from our congregation were in Culver City on the first day of construction by volunteers on Patience House, a new home being built by a coalition of churches with Habitat for Humanity. Did any of our team make it to worship today? Congratulations, builders! There will be several more build dates throughout the Fall — see Martha Ross if you're interested in getting involved. And thanks, too, to all who are supporting our build through your gifts and your prayers.

When completed, Patience House will become home to the Mulvihill family. The goal of Habitat for Humanity is to eliminate substandard housing by making decent, affordable housing a matter of conscience and action in our communities. I don't have to tell you that there is a HUGE need for affordable housing in Southern California. Habitat homes are one part of the solution. They employ a unique model in which the future resident family assists in the building process. They then purchase the home through an affordable, noninterest loan. Then the homeowners' monthly mortgage payments are used to help build even more homes. It's a beautiful plan that is effective, efficient, and empowering of those who build and those who find friends, support, and a home to call their own. Thanks be to God.

Today we are commissioning our 2018 Youth Service Project Team—5 adults and 13 youth. They leave next Saturday for New Orleans—yep—hot, humid New Orleans—to repair homes damaged or neglected after Hurricanes Katrina and Isaac. Think about it. Hurricane Katrina hit in August 2005, nearly thirteen years ago, and the recovery is still on-going. This congregation has sent adult and youth teams nearly every year since. We're part of a United Methodist tradition of being among the first in and the last to leave after any disaster. We're known for that across the non-profit relief agency world.

In addition to embodying compassion and hope, our teams embody perseverance. We are resilient and steadfast in the face of what otherwise could appear to be insurmountable obstacles. We believe, and we witness to the fact that when we act together with God, we can make a new and renewed future possible.

Let me see a show of hands of all of you who have been on a work team to New Orleans, and who have contributed financial support to one of our teams? Thank you. Again, it's safe to say that the lives of those who have gone have been impacted as deeply as those whose homes have been repaired. And that the relationships formed between homeowners and team members have changed hearts and opened new pathways of understanding, empathy, and commitment.

That's just a sampling of what we're doing “officially” as a congregation. It doesn't begin to cover the countless ways so many of you are involved in the community, day in and day out, making a difference, being the hope, becoming the face of God's gracious life-giving love.

We are the contemporary expression of the story we read this morning from Mark's Gospel, the story of Jesus sending his disciples out, expanding his ministry of teaching, preaching and healing, multiplying his efforts and carrying on his work in the world.

He sent them out, just as he sends us out into this messy and astonishing world where so many are hoping for a word of life and of hope. And just like those first disciples, even though we may be less than perfect, or have but a little training and few resources, even though our words and best intentions sometimes alienate or fail to connect... even so...through our faithful efforts, many are made whole. Many grasp onto some hope. Many find new life.

When Jesus sends disciples into the world, commanding us, really, to go and become the incarnation of God's love in the world, the Greek word used for “go” literally means “to depart, to leave, to cross boundaries.” We see this in Jesus himself. The gospels tell story after story of him reaching out to cross boundaries and build bridges. So we, as his disciples do the same, reaching out to bridge boundaries, be they geographic, sociological, racial, or cultural. As his disciples, sent into the



world, we witness to the God who has bound humanity together in care for one another, regardless of any differences between us.

We are a congregation that understands what it means to be sent, sent by Jesus as his disciples into the world, for the sake of the world, and as we United Methodists say, for the transformation of the world. Following the example of Christ himself, we are always sending disciples out for the work of God transforming the world—providing comfort to those who mourn, giving strength to those who serve, giving shelter to those who are homeless, bringing hope to those who have all but given up, being the hope for those who need to see and hear and hug a real live human being who loves them and cares enough about them to look them in the eye and call them by name and say: I'll walk with you and together, with God's help, we will build a better tomorrow. How the world needs this boundary-crossing wholeness-creating love.

Let me just add that when we send our teams out, we give them instructions and training. For example, our Habitat Team that worked yesterday was told "Wear sturdy close-toed shoes (mandatory) and bring construction gloves if you have them • You may want to bring your own water to stay hydrated • Lunch will be provided. They also had to forego shorts, even on such a hot day, wearing long pants for their own protection and safety.

And when we send our youth work teams out, they get some training before they go on the safe use of construction tools and in various building techniques. They get really good at what they do. So much so that when we sent our team to Houston this Spring, it was the folks who'd had experience on past youth teams who gave the older members of the team some tips and pointers about how best to do the work.

This seems to stand in stark contrast with how Jesus sent his teams out: "take nothing for the journey," he told them, "except a staff. No bread, no bag, no money in your belts." What's that about? Can you imagine what our youth parents would say if we told our youth anything remotely similar to that? We'd be seen as neglectful and derelict in our duty.

I think Jesus isn't talking so much about "stuff" here as he is about "heart." I think he's conveying something like: "When you go in my name, as my disciples, be yourself. Be authentic. Be real. Let your faith shine through all that you do and say. It's not about what you have or what you wear but about who you are. Your authenticity, your integrity is as important to your mission as the work you accomplish. Your stuff is just stuff. What breaks down barriers, what builds new relationships of friendship, understanding, and love—that comes from your heart."

And that shows in your eyes, is heard in your voice, and shapes your inmost prayer. He said: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

I pray that next Sunday we will be welcoming our guest musicians from Ghana, and in so doing breaking down any barriers that would otherwise separate us one from another.

Dear teams, thank you for responding to the call of Christ who sends you to Houston, Culver City, Haiti, and New Orleans, to rebuild homes and hearts and to create new bonds of love.

Together may we live into God's vision for a beautiful and peaceful world as we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.