

Comings and Goings

Mark 6:7-13

FBC Midland - June 13, 2010

Today we are commissioning 12 people from our congregation to go on a short-term mission trip to Ghana, Africa. Short-term mission trips are not a new thing. Lots of churches send out mission teams. In fact, our own church has sent a number of teams, both overseas, like to Mexicali, Mexico, and to Nicaragua, and also for more local needs, such as the youth trip to Hamtramck this summer.

You may be interested to know that Jesus sent out his own disciples on their very first short-term mission trip. He gave them very specific instructions, and in our group-building exercises, the Ghana team has looked at this passage to learn from Jesus' teachings.

Perhaps the first thing to recognize is that up to this point in Jesus' ministry, the predominant word has been "come". "Come" unto me, learn of me, follow me, hear the words I bring, accept me, love me, allow me to be your Lord and Savior. You see, there has to be a commitment on our part before there can be

any meaningful mission. We first have to “buy in” to Jesus’ message of love and forgiveness. We first have to understand and experience His saving power in our own lives. We first have to “come” to Jesus, just as we are, and allow Him to change us.

When we “come to Jesus”, just as we are, and experience His love and forgiveness, then we have a story to share. We feel excited to tell others about the change that has taken place in our lives. One of the things I have challenged the Ghana team to do is to write out a short testimony of why they have chosen to be a follower of Jesus. When you go on a mission trip, you should always be prepared to speak about how you came to embrace Christianity, and became a follower of Jesus. People want to know; why have you traveled to our country? What do you hope to do here? What motivates you to want to help us? We should always be ready to give a reason for the hope that dwells within us. As it says in I Peter 3:15-16, “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

That last part is so important, isn’t it? To share our story with gentleness and respect. We all know what happens when we try to cram religion down other

people's throats. We all know how that feels when it's done to us. Instead, we are commissioned by Jesus to share our story, simply and in humility. We are called to invite others to hear the good news. We are not called to focus on results, but on sowing the seed. God's Spirit will do the rest. That takes a huge burden off of us!

Yet we are called to "go". We cannot be comfortable in just the "coming to Jesus" part. Jesus sent the disciples out two by two, and He is still commissioning His emissaries, His ambassadors, today. There is an expectation here. Jesus "calls the 12 disciples to him, and sends them out." He also gives them power, and authority, to deal with difficult situations they may encounter along the way. Jesus is in the business of equipping his disciples, and so He does today.

I am convinced that God is always going ahead of us, preparing the way, and that He invites us to join Him in His work, which is already taking place. Our job, is to open our eyes, and try to discern where God is moving, and make ourselves available to join Him.

To that end, we don't need a lot of baggage. And I mean that literally, and also figuratively. Jesus spent time explaining to the disciples what they were to take on their journey, and most of it was to be left behind. Now of course this passage needs to be understood in the context of the place and time in which it

was written, yet it also has some great lessons for us to consider. When we carry too much of our stuff with us, we tend to worry about keeping it safe, and we get bogged down with feeling responsible for our paraphernalia. We are to travel light, so that we may focus on the work we are called to do, and also on the people we are going to serve.

Likewise, we are to learn to be content with the hospitality that is offered to us. There may be some “hardships” to endure, like 5 minute showers, and different foods, and restroom facilities that will not be as opulent as we are accustomed to. The chief question should not be “how do I like it?”, but to maintain a spirit of humility and thankfulness for the hospitality that is offered. I liked this quote from The Interpreter’s Bible: “Do not let the search for comfort transform an apostle into a ‘fussbox’”. Nothing can harm our mission efforts more than to come across as ungrateful and selfish.

What do we do if our message is not received and accepted with open arms? How are we to respond to hardened hearts? This next part of the instruction given by Jesus has been grievously misused. We have all heard, and maybe said ourselves, that we “just shook the dust of that place off our feet”,

when what we really mean is that the going got altogether too tough, and we quit!

I believe that the better way to understand this passage is to realize that it is a direction to move on in spite of failure. When we meet disappointment, and we will at some point, we are not to let ourselves get completely stopped. We are to close the chapter there, and move on to the next town, or to the next challenge. Remember, Jesus Himself met failure in Nazareth, where “He could do no mighty act.” So he moved on. There will be new opportunities, and the Spirit will guide us, as we are sensitive to His leading.

The passage ends by telling us what the disciples did. Verses 12-13 says, “So they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.”

In the power of the Spirit, we send out these 12 to share the gospel, the good news of Jesus, in humility, and with gentleness and respect. We send them out to overcome many obstacles and trust that God’s spirit will empower them to meet the tasks they undertake. Finally, we send them out to be a healing balm to all those who are suffering and in need. Let us promise to lift them up in prayer every day, and to eagerly await the stories they will have to share. Amen.