

It's a privilege for the teaching team to continue our series, verse by verse, through the Gospel of Mark. We have spoken in recent weeks about what it means to become a follower of Christ. One phrase that has resonated amongst us, and hopefully it's resonated with you, is the word apprentice. This idea of understanding that being a follower of Jesus is being an apprentice to Jesus. And why apprentice? How does that help us in our modern world?

An apprentice is a learner. An apprentice learns from the teacher. An apprentice is a worker. He follows the teacher. He helps the teacher; he imitates the teacher. He obeys what the teacher asks. And an apprentice stays close to the teacher. Close enough to learn the right things. And then close enough to apply the right things. An apprentice wants to be like his teacher.

Many years ago, I worked for a reinforcing steel company. We had ironworkers. It was a union shop and a union field. We had all these union jobs, and since I worked in the office, I was a non-union guy. I wasn't allowed to touch a piece of steel. I mean, that was what they did. And maybe some of you don't know what life was like, but it was a pretty strong union environment, union culture. One time we got a job that was a non-union job, which was very rare. I'd always wanted to know what it was like to be an ironworker. I thought I would go out there and work because I could now. I got to wear a shiny hard hat, a tool belt that had pliers in the back, and steel-toed boots. I was in pretty good shape. I mean, what could go wrong? I showed up at the job site at 7:00 am. We had a foreman in there, and there were several apprentices, so I joined them.

Our job started at seven in the morning, and we carried rebar, and steel rods, on our shoulders from the truck out onto the job site and placed them in certain areas. I thought we would do this for a few minutes. No, the idea is if you're an apprentice, you carry the steel as long as there is steel to carry. You don't get to tie it; you don't get to use your shiny pliers and your wires. Punking steel is what they called it. I was smiling, whistling while I worked, whatever. It's like, "Oh, it is good to be outdoors a little bit." Well, after an hour, I wasn't smiling. I wasn't whistling. I craved a cappuccino, and I wasn't going to get that out there.

My shoulder was really hurting, and I told the foreman, which was a big mistake. I told the foreman that my shoulder ached, and he laughed, and he said, "Oh, don't worry. After time you'll develop calluses on your shoulders." I'm not sure if the next part is true, but he said, "And then after a while, you'll develop hair on your shoulder, and that'll serve as padding when you carry the steel." And still, to this day, I don't know if he was teasing me or not. Are any ironworkers here? I'd love to talk to you in the courtyard. Tell me if that's a true story.

But what was going on there is I was receiving an education on apprenticeship. I saw that the path of an apprentice is not always smiles and whistles; there's hardship, there's exhaustion, there's obedience, there's risk, and most of these guys had back issues and retired pretty early. But by the end of the day, as I crawled into bed, I was very thankful that I was going to college and that this wouldn't be my career. I learned that an apprentice had a place, a job, and a purpose.

What we've learned so far in Mark is that the Twelve who followed Jesus were called disciples. and I'm fine if we replace that word in our thinking with apprentice. Disciple literally means learner. The Twelve had watched Jesus for the past year. He announced the arrival of his kingdom. They watched him call people to repentance, teach the multitudes, perform miracles, cast out demons, and heal the sick. They watched Jesus do this, and now something changes in the story. These apprentices who had watched were about to get a job change. They were being trained now to be journeymen. To stick with the analogy, Jesus was going to delegate his authority and his power to these Twelve, and they were now going to set out to do the work of Jesus throughout this whole region of Galilee.

It was as if Jesus was saying, "Your next step of learning is by doing. You've observed, now you do, and you are ready to try this work that I've been doing. I'm going to send you to do this. Consider yourself sent," he's saying to them.

So today, we're going to look at what it means to be sent. It's a natural progression to go from learner to laborer, from student to sent one, inside the church walls to outside the church walls, from huddling together to then going out and proclaiming. No matter how much any of us today might be struggling in our walk with God or following Jesus, no matter the discouragement we may feel this morning, and we may feel very distant from God. We may feel that he's not paying attention to us, we are apprentices. And as a result, we are sent out, and this is an important message for all of us, to replicate Jesus' ministry. We are to go out as apprentices and realize that it won't always be easy. We'll face opposition. We need to be encouraged that the power of God will bring a return on the labor that he calls us to do.

The big idea from our passage this morning is pretty clear and straightforward. Apprentices are sent out to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So we're going to see here in verses 7 through 13 that Jesus spells out these instructions for how the Twelve should minister in an unbelieving world. This is our calling. This is our role that we have as followers of Jesus. So first, the replication of Jesus' ministry.

"Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over

impure spirits" (Mark 6:6b-7). So what we're reading about here is really a comparison to a modern-day short-term missions trip or project. Mark is telling us that crowds followed Jesus. And for a year, the Twelve marveled at the works of Jesus, and now we see that he is delegating this ministry for the first time. So they're trying out what they've watched, and Jesus is saying, "I'm going to replicate my ministry times Twelve." He is replicating his words, his works, his miracles times twelve. We don't know how far from home Jesus sent them or really how long they were gone, but we know that it was a short-term venture.

It says he began to send them out. The idea is that it was a process where he commissioned a pair of them at a time and then sent them out with instructions. Why pairs? Well, it's pretty logical—companionship and a complementation of gifts between the two.

I remember back in the days when we were doing campus ministry, and we were doing some door-to-door ministry, and we would always be sent out in pairs. The idea was that one of us would share, and one of us would pray. And then both of us would listen. It just was beautiful to not do it alone, to have a partner.

He gave them authority. That word for authority here is *exousian*, a Greek word. The idea is that Jesus delegated to them the power that came from God that only comes through the authority that Jesus gave them. It reminds us that when we minister in anything we do, we're to never view it as something we do under our own power. It's God's power. God's authority.

It reminded me of Moses when he was standing before God, and God was sending him. He's saying, "Moses's considering yourself sent. I'm sending you back to Pharaoh." And he said, "I can't go to Pharaoh; nobody will believe that you sent me." And God told Moses to throw down his staff. And Moses threw down the staff and it turned into a snake. And then he told Moses to pick up his staff. And he picked up the snake, and it turned back into a staff. God told Moses to take his hand and stick it under his coat and now pull it out. And his hand went from healthy to leprous, white, flaky. And he told him to put it back in the coat. Moses put it back in the coat and pulled it out, and it was back to normal. Moses never forgot that as he approached the Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth, that he came with the authority and power of God. We're not sent out under our own power.

"These were his instructions: 'Take nothing for the journey except a staff—'" (Mark 6:8a). I want to stop there. Why would a staff be significant? Because in that day and age, the staff was the symbol of concern, a symbol of compassion. It was a symbol of a shepherd who gently cared for his sheep. It indicated a long-suffering, a kindness, and that crook was an indicator of the gentle shepherd guiding his sheep. That was the attitude that he was sending them out with. He didn't say, "And take your rod and thump the sheep when they get out of line; there's a rebuke, a correction." He didn't say, "Take the rod." He said, "Take the staff."

"...no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town." (Mark 6:8b-10). So first of all, he's saying travel light, no food, big

suitcase, or money. Wear sandals. I get that. If you've walked around that region, it's rocky and hilly. One shirt. Well, why is that? Well, usually, travelers had two shirts and two tunics. You, of course, would wear both if it was cold, but the idea was when you'd go to bed, you'd wear one tunic, and the other would serve as a blanket to keep you warm out in the elements.

It says that the Twelve were to stay in homes in the villages, in private homes, and they would receive the hospitality of that host. They would be fed and housed. He specified to stay in the same house until they left that town. So the lesson he's teaching is that there is a temptation to always seek comfort and luxury. God wanted to teach them contentment and resilience, and he was using an uncomfortableness or maybe a hardship. The theme here is to depend on God for every bit of the journey and for us to depend on God for every bit of our journey and our ministry.

"And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them" (Mark 6:11). So Jesus is telling them there will be a reaction. And even with their authority and power, they may not be welcomed into every town. Remember, Jesus wasn't welcomed into his hometown of Nazareth. When Jews traveled on business in gentile areas where there was pagan worship, and if the business in that town didn't go well, there was a saying, I shook the dust off my feet as I left that town. So we must understand that Jesus is telling them when they shake the dust off their feet, they need to do it with a heart that is breaking for those who are there, those who are rejecting the gospel. Remember, this is about God's love for sinners. It's about sharing the gift of salvation. And really, the shaking of the dust off the feet is also a warning that if a person persists in rejecting Jesus, there's judgment.

It's a wake-up call to us that when we're sent, as we see ourselves sent, to not be discouraged if only a few respond and many don't. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus says, *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."* This is one of the many times that Jesus speaks about judgment and about being saved from the wrath that's to come.

So in verse 12, we see what the Twelve are sent to do. *"They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them"* (v. 12). So they preached repentance. Their message was, "Admit your sin against God. Repent back to God with all your heart into a new direction." And it's the same message that Jesus preached. As we saw in earlier sections of Mark, he preached repentance. It's preaching that in repentance, that's where salvation is found.

Because God loves us so much, he demonstrated his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The idea is we can have, through forgiveness, an authentic personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is the good news of the gospel. In order to appreciate the good news, we need to hear the bad news about our condition and why we need Christ. So we need to hear about our sin

first. In the case of these Jews, I think Jesus was instructing the Twelve and the Jews and the villagers here and called them to repent from the self-righteous religion that they practiced and accept Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah.

Mark goes on to say that they drove out many demons. He said, "You will confront the satanic and the demonic world, the dark forces. You'll confront that on your journey." And along with Jesus' authority, they were given the power to cast out demons. And this validated that Jesus' kingdom has power over the evil kingdom and has power over Satan. Satan and his kingdoms will not win in the end. This is a beautiful ancient story.

We have prayer warriors at CPC who go into battle every day on our behalf, praying with compassion, praying under the authority of Jesus, with the power of Jesus to release people from all kinds of bondage, including the demonic. Mark says that the Twelve healed sick people, they anointed them with oil and prayed for healing, and people got well.

The oil in the Old Testament was used for medicinal purposes, and it came, in the New Testament, to symbolize the divine presence of God in healing prayer. We have prayer warriors at CPC. So it's not just an ancient story. We have prayer warriors at CPC, who pray with compassion for those who are sick, and under the authority of the elders, we anoint people with oil that ask for prayers for healing. We anoint them with oil and then pray that they are healed from their suffering.

Some thoughts here on verses 7-13 before we continue in the story. As we consider ourselves sent:

Preach the gospel.

Francis of Assisi is credited with saying, "Preach the gospel and, if necessary, use words." Okay, that sounds clever. I kind of like it, and I've used it before, but it's actually not biblically correct here. The gospel, as we see here in Mark, must always be communicated with words. We need to learn how to articulate the gospel that saves us.

Demonstrate the love and compassion of God.

That's what we're called to do as sent ones. This means praying for the sick and caring for the sick. It means praying for the oppressed. Caring for the least among us.

Allow yourself into situations where you are dependent on God.

I know that's hard for a lot of us to consider. To put ourselves in situations where we must learn to trust God. To walk in faith. To recognize that God provides. As he provides for the sparrows, he provides for us. For us who consider ourselves sent, we ask for the power of God to work through us. That there's no way, we can ever claim credit for anything that's done for him.

Don't seek your own personal comfort first.

Embrace the fact that this is a journey and being an apprentice is not comfortable all the time. These Twelve were sent to sacrifice. When the disciples were recommissioned as apostles in the Book of Acts, out

of the Twelve that were recommissioned, 11 of them died a martyr's death, and one of them died in exile.

Practice hospitality.

Being sent can mean initiating conversations with our neighbors and inviting them to sit at our dinner tables. I'm kind of giving away our future a little bit, but as we continue to lean into our vision, hospitality will become a centerpiece of our gospel ministry to reach those outside the walls of the church. So consider yourself sent to your neighbors. Open your hearts to them, and build relationships with them. Initiate spiritual conversations with them and feed them a good meal.

I understand more and more the sense of urgency around this as I get older. Time is flowing by. I'll never forget this illustration. Time is like a roll of toilet paper. When you're young and you're pulling off the sheets, the roll is moving slowly. You think this will go on forever and ever. But as you get toward the end and you're pulling sheets off, that roll is spinning fast! Many of us who are older are realizing that it's spinning fast! So we take advantage of what we have.

I just want to shout out to many of our older folks at CPC, who understand this and are giving generously of their time, money, and their skills. There is a ministry we have to veterans. A group of older men and women leading higher power. A group of older men and women praying for the sick and afflicted. These are great models for the rest of us.

So partner up. Not only is ministry more fun, but it's also how God designed it to be more successful. Something I read this week was very quotable. "Comfortable Christianity won't change the world" (author unknown). And I think these next verses that we're about to read will paint a picture for apprentices like us of what we may face as we're sent out to not only replicate Jesus's ministry, to multiply it but also those strong reactions that come to ministry and to prepare us today for all kinds of rejection.

So the rest of our story centers around King Herod Antipas and John the Baptist as we look at Herod's reaction to Jesus' ministry. Who is King Herod? His name is Herod Antipas. His father was Herod the Great, and Herod the Great was the same king at the time Jesus was born. He was the one who had those baby boys killed when Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fled to Egypt.

Herod the Great had ten wives. Now just let that sink in for a minute, ten wives. Herod Antipas was Herod the Great's son from his fourth wife. There were lots of little Herods running around. So Herod the Great ruled over the entire Palestine region, which was part of the Roman Empire. He was granted this rule by Caesar Augustus, and he was only given this rule out of the generosity of Caesar.

When Herod the Great died, he divided his kingdom into four parts and willed it to four of his sons. Herod Antipas as one of his sons, became Antipas the tetrarch, which meant he ruled over a fourth of the kingdom. So his kingdom was Galilee down to the Dead Sea. And then Mark tells us what happened. The buzz about Jesus and his Twelve followers had finally reached Herod.

King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." Mark 6:14-15

Well, why Elijah? In the Old Testament book of Malachi, it was prophesied that Elijah would come back when the Lord was to return. And that's why serious Jews to this day who practice Passover will leave an open seat waiting for Elijah. Other gospel accounts mentioned that some people thought that he was Jeremiah. Jeremiah had the nickname of the compassionate weeping prophet because he wept while he watched the destruction of Jerusalem.

"But when Herod heard this, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!'" (Mark 6:16). Now, there's something significant about the original language here. This is first-person emphasis. It's emphatic; it's emotional. Herod was afraid, and I'm sure he had nightmares that some headless John the Baptist was going to visit him in the night and haunt him. As we read this story, we're going to discover that Herod Antipas was not only afraid of John, he was afraid of his wife. He was afraid of losing face, and he was afraid of Rome taking away his power.

So now Mark flashes back to tell the story of how John the Baptist's murder is executed. John was the man that Jesus said was the greatest Old Testament prophet. John was Jesus' cousin, who baptized Jesus and the one who said, "I must decrease, so Jesus, the Lamb of God can increase." And the one who said, "I'm not worthy to untie his sandal."

"For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married" (Mark 6:17). So Herod had this palace, home, prison, a fort named Machaerus on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, which is in modern-day Jordan. And Herod held John in prison below the palace. He was probably in there for about a year. And why was he in there? Because he had called out Herod after Herod had seduced his brother, Phillip's wife, Herodias.

It gets worse. And then Herod marries Herodias, who was actually his sister-in-law of his half-brother, Philip. Herodias has a teenage daughter by Philip, who then became Herod's stepdaughter. So she's also his niece and stepdaughter. This week, I spent some time trying to untie this and untangle the family tree of Herod. I don't even think ancestry.com could have helped me. It's a tangled, convoluted mess. Good luck if you want to explore this. All I know is that the family tree is stained with murder, incest, and betrayal, and it leaves this bloody road of hurt and suffering.

"For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife'" (Mark 6:18). Talk about the direct approach of evangelism there. John continues to call out Herod for his sin.

So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod

heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. Mark 6:19-20

So Herodias is waiting for this opportunity to kill John, but it won't come easy because Herod actually has a bit of a conscience. And Herod was curious about John. No doubt, John was very engaging, very compelling, and a very entertaining preacher. John had been in that prison a while, so Herod had spent time with him. He was also taken aback by John's fearlessness, which distressed him even more. His conscience was tormenting him. His wife was tormenting him. His public image was taking a hit. So to satisfy his pride and avenge his wife, he throws himself this lavish birthday party.

Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. Mark 6:21-22a

Now we have to understand that this was a male-only party. It was a party that celebrated gluttony, drunkenness, and lust. Most commentators believe that even the religious Jews, the upper echelon, and the elite Jews must have attended since Herod called himself a converted Jew.

And the highlight of the evening was when Herod's stepdaughter/niece came out and danced. Now, she didn't stand on a stage clogging, okay? That wasn't the kind of dance here. It was a seductive dance. Herod and his dinner guests would have ogled over this teenager, and Herod was pleased when he looked around, and he saw how the other men loved her dance.

He began to brag. He got liquored up. He began to brag about his power. *"The king said to the girl, 'Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you.' And he promised her with an oath, 'Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom'" (Mark 6:22b-23).* What is so interesting about this is that Herod really didn't have anything to give her. Everything that was given to him by his father was granted by the emperor, and he could not have given it even if he wanted to.

In fact, history records that toward the end of Antipas and Herodias' life, as they got older, they went to the emperor at that time, which was Caligula. Now there's a cruel person in history. They went to Caligula and said, "I'd like you to expand our kingdom." And what was Caligula's response? He exiled them. He banished them. So that's how much authority they actually had here.

She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his

head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. Mark 6:24-28

Just imagine that exchange between a mother and daughter. And Herod, at any point, could have said, "I was wrong. John was innocent, a righteous man." But he couldn't give in to his pride. And Mark says the king was distressed. He was sorry for what he did. But there's a difference between being sorry and being repentant.

There's a difference between Herod's worldly sorrow. "Oh, I messed up. I've blown it here. I've been found out." To godly sorrow, which is, "God forgive me because I've sinned against you. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:10 describes Godly sorrow. *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."*

True repentance is turning 180 degrees away from sin. It's mourning one's sin. It's asking for forgiveness. It's accepting God's forgiveness. Isn't that beautiful? God's repentance is a gift that leaves no regret. There's no evidence that Herod ever repented. So today, we need to be assured that John is in heaven. The greatest prophet of the Old Testament considered himself sent, and he was martyred because he dared to point people to Jesus. And now heaven is his home. He has received his eternal reward for his service.

"On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb" (Mark 6:29). Like Joseph of Arimathea did with Jesus' body after the crucifixion, taking it down from the cross and placing it in a tomb, John's disciples came and put it in a tomb waiting for the resurrection.

So Mark finishes this section by bringing out this story, this reaction to the message of Jesus that all of us who are sent must be sobered by. And then all the Twelve were brought home. They were brought back, and they were to report their adventures to Jesus and share about the fruitful returns of their ministry on their missions trip. *"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught" (Mark 6:30).* I imagine they were saying to Jesus, "Jesus, this was awesome. We were able to do what you do. We preached repentance, and not everybody repented, but some people repented. But then we were able to cast out demons in your name, and we anointed people in oil, as you said, and we prayed for the sick, and many were healed of their afflictions."

I can imagine James, who was one of the Twelve and would later become a leader in the Christian Church in Jerusalem. He's probably thinking; I have to write this down somewhere about what happened. And you know, in James' letter, in chapter 5, he writes this, and this is something we hold onto as elders at the church. *"Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14).*

Wouldn't you have loved to be at that mission's debrief to hear them swap stories about how God had worked in their lives? And one more

thing, I don't know if you caught this, but here in verse 30, Mark doesn't call them the Twelve. He calls them apostles. He now calls them apostles, which means sent one. And an important principle here, as disciples, as learners, we are to become apostles. We are to become sent ones, and that applies to all of us. We're to use our gifts to represent Christ inside the church and outside the church. When we turn it outward, our vision becomes renewed. We become animated in our purpose, and God works.

So our calling today is as apprentices, we're sent out to share the Gospel of Jesus because Jesus considers us sent ones. He considers us sent to replicate his ministry. He warns us that there'll be a reaction and that many will reject us, but then we're to come back together and celebrate the reports of all that he has done. That's what we do on Sundays. As we share our stories in various settings of how God is working.

We have to remember that the rejection of Jesus put him on the cross. And what was meant for evil became good, that God took something tragic and turned it into a victory. And Jesus, in the last weeks of his life in Matthew 23, spoke this condemnation that Matthew wrote down. It's a stinging rebuke against the leaders who rejected him and the prophets before him. *"So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!" (Matthew 23:31-32).*

And what we remember today is that when Jesus died on the cross, he paid the penalty for our sins. He paid the penalty for the sins of all who believe. The Scriptures in John 1:12 *"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* What a promise. And Jesus made sinners his kingdom citizens for eternity. That's what we are. Showering us with worth, equipping us with his power so we can be called out to serve him.

There are so many beautiful pictures of the good news in scripture. The moment we accept Christ, trust his work on the cross, and realize that it was sufficient to save us, we were instantly brought out of death and into life. We have gone from being separated and condemned to being joined and accepted by Christ. Out of darkness into light. Out of the judgment of hell into the bliss of heaven. This is the good news of the gospel. From the sons and daughters of the world to becoming sons and daughters of God, to be counted among the disciples as followers of Christ. Sent out to serve.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your son. This gift is priceless. We don't deserve it, and we could never earn favor for us to receive it. Our salvation, Lord, we thank you as a gift of grace that we receive on faith. We worship you. We thank you for life, and we desire, Lord, that we give you our hearts. May you convict us of our calling to follow Jesus as followers who are sent. Amen.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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