

July 22, 2018

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mark 6:30-34

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Background:

The gospel text from last week described Jesus sending the Twelve out, entrusting them with his authority over unclean spirits, and exhorting them to preach repentance. The text concluded with a statement that they had been very successful. "The Twelve drove out many demons and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them." (Mark 6:13)

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This is the only place in Mark's gospel where the disciples are called apostles. The Greek word that is used here emphasizes the relationship between the one sending and the one being sent. The one being sent is sent as a representative of the one doing the sending. The only authority that the sent person has is that of the sender. Given this type of relationship, it would be expected that when those who have been sent return, they would give a report to the sender. In the opening verse of our gospel, Mark states simply that the apostles reported back to Jesus all that they had taught and done in his name.

Jesus invited the disciples to escape with him to a deserted place. At the time of Jesus, 90 percent of the people lived in small hamlets of 50 to 150 persons. The people who formed these small communities were often relatives through numerous lines of relationships. In the economic structures of the day, these same few people were the source for everything that was needed for survival. Privacy between people in these communities was nonexistent. The going and coming of people from other areas was noticed by everyone. The travelers might bring something special, or they might bring some threat to the community, and they might also bring news from the world beyond the small community.

The return of the Twelve from distant places would be an occasion for suspicion, curiosity, and hope of news from distant lands. Mark states that so many people were coming and going that Jesus and the disciples did not even have an opportunity to eat. The reality may have been that they could not eat with so many guests. In this culture it would have been unthinkable to eat and not invite guests to join you. (Mark 6:31b) Those who were aware of the return of the Twelve were also aware of their needing rest. Travel was difficult. Yet the people followed Jesus and the disciples anyway.

If the return of the disciples was a cause for the local people to seek them out, their attempted escape to a deserted place would add another layer to the townspeople's curiosity. The areas between villages and hamlets were dangerous, they were regions of chaos. It would have been extraordinary that Jesus and the disciples would desire to escape into this area of chaos. The fact that so many people who avoided these places their

entire lives were willing to set out into the chaos to see what Jesus and the disciples were doing is a window into the depth of their desire to know.

The image of the people of Israel being like sheep without a shepherd appears several times in the Hebrew Scriptures. This image would have been familiar to Mark's community. Moses prayed that Yahweh would send a new leader for the people so that they would not be like sheep without a shepherd (Nm 27:12). Ezekiel 34:1-31 uses the image to describe the people of Israel, when those who had been entrusted with the care of the people instead used the people and their possessions for their own benefit. The characterization of the people as being like sheep without a shepherd and Jesus beginning to teach them would have been seen as a criticism of the Jewish leadership who abandoned the common people and left them hungry for guidance.

#### Reflection Questions:

1. What is your experience of spending significant time with extended family?
2. When you think of being able to visit with people who have traveled to places that you think of as dangerous, you find yourself ...
3. If you were to imagine your house being so filled with extended family members going and coming that there was not time to eat, you would ...
4. What comes to mind when you think of a deserted place?
5. Imagine you are among the disciples and Jesus suggests that you join him in escaping to a quieter place. What is going through your mind as you hear Jesus' invitation?
6. When you consider Jesus like this with enough concern to make time and space for the people from the towns and for the disciples, what do you find arising within you?
7. The gospel describes people of the region who are willing to leave their homes and seek out Jesus. When I think of these people I find myself ...
8. Can you talk with God about your desire to seek out Jesus, or about his desire to be present to both the people of the village and the disciples, or about some other awareness that arose within you as you prayed with this gospel?

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Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord.  
Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people:  
You have scattered my sheep and driven them away.  
You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds.  
I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them  
and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply.  
I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them  
so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing, says the Lord.  
Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David;  
as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land.  
In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security.  
This is the name they give him: "The Lord our justice."

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose;  
beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side  
with your rod and your staff that give me courage.  
You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.

Brothers and sisters: In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ.  
For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity,  
through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims,  
that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two,  
thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross,  
putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off  
and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught.  
He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."  
People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat.  
So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place.  
People saw them leaving and many came to know about it.  
They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them.  
When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them,  
for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

**Excerpts from Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; and Mark 6:30-34**

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This is the only place in Mark's gospel where the disciples are called apostles. The Greek word that is used here emphasizes the relationship between the one sending and the one being sent. The one being sent is sent as a representative of the one doing the sending. The only authority that the sent person has is that of the sender. Given this type of relationship, it would be expected that when those who have been sent return, they would give a report to the sender. In the opening verse of our gospel, Mark states simply that the apostles reported back to Jesus all that they had taught and done in his name.

Jesus invited the disciples to escape with him to a deserted place. At the time of Jesus, 90 percent of the people lived in small hamlets of 50 to 150 persons. The people who formed these small communities were often relatives through numerous lines of relationships. In the economic structures of the day, these same few people were the source for everything that was needed for survival. Privacy between people in these communities was nonexistent. The going and coming of people from other areas was noticed by everyone. The travelers might bring something special, or they might bring some threat to the community, and they might also bring news from the world beyond the small community.

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