

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 12, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:7-13

"Shake the Dust Off"

In today's Gospel – Jesus' sending the disciples out "two by two" was a sign that God's kingdom was breaking in - at last. It was urgent to get this message out – and for the disciples to take the bare minimum with them – obediently relying on local hospitality, focusing only on the task at hand. The task they were given by Jesus, with specific instructions – needed to be followed to the letter. Jesus was very specific to them in how they were to carry out His message – **with no deviation!**

Recently during my daily office readings – I was stopped dead in my tracks by one of the readings. My immediate thought was "you've got to be kidding!" "We are seeing the very same thing being done today – all around us." The reading was Numbers 20: 1-13, and I really couldn't believe the correlation – and then its direct connection to today's Holy Gospel reading from Mark. Let me share some of the verses with you:

Numbers 20:7-8 *"The LORD said to Moses," ""Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. **Speak to that rock** before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."* It goes on in verses 11-12: *"Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank." "But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because **you did not trust in me** enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."*

Moses was given clear instructions by God – to go, take his staff, with Aaron and **speak to the rock and it will give water**. He said nothing about using the staff – or hitting anything. There was a time earlier at the very same place, at Meribah, that God told Moses to strike the rock with his staff in order to bring out water – but NOT this time! Moses had a touch of Frank Sinatra – he had to do it his way – and **struck the rock – not once – but twice**. Could He do what he was told? Could he be obedient to the creator of the water, of the rock, of everything? And as the late John Belushi used to say "but Nooooooo!"

We can make fun all we want – but the fact remains that the God of the Universe, the God of detail gave clear and implicit instructions – and mankind couldn't follow them. This of course was not the first time – remember the Garden of Eden? It certainly wouldn't be the last. In children's chapel I will teach the children about the Garden of Eden, from the Scriptures, about the "fruit." From time to time I will come back to this teaching and ask them what kind of fruit did Adam and Eve eat? They respond "we don't know!" Of course everyone who doesn't know the Scripture about it likes to make it an apple. It would have been a pomegranate, or even a cumquat; it might have been a peach – but it doesn't say. God's implicit instruction to them was clear – they could have anything to eat in the entire Garden, except the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They could have anything they wanted - but that is a whole other sermon for another day. God wanted to show the people His power and His majesty – but Moses couldn't follow God's will. The Lord clearly told Him what to do – but Moses had a

better idea! And because of that, both Moses and Aaron paid the penalty – they did not get to go to the Promised Land – and died instead. **Don't put words – or actions in God's mouth; His Word does His speaking.** Nothing is clearer to us than the recent redefinition of God's instruction in His Word that marriage is between one MAN and one WOMAN – by the Supreme Court of the United States. I believe that **no one should redefine God's Holy Word - EVER!** We cannot play God – nor should the Supreme Court of the United States!

Jesus chose His twelve to be special leaders – to be “fishers of men.” They were hard workers, who would also have to be “special followers” – people who could follow orders. Please turn with me to page 1565 of your Pew Bibles to Mark 6: 7-9 *"Calling the Twelve to him, Jesus sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits." "These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in your belts." "Wear sandals but not an extra tunic." (Mark 6:7-9)* They were called to be “kingdom heralds” warning people that something was about to happen and that everyone needed to get ready for it.

Do you remember the E.B.S. tests that you would hear on the radio? It would say “This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. The Broadcasters in your area in cooperation with... (yada, yada, yada) This is only a test! That is the way I used to do it. Then you would hear a loud tone that made you want to turn off the radio – followed by the words: “Had this been an actual emergency you would have been instructed....” Well, you know the rest. I must have executed hundreds of these tests over my 30+ years behind the mic as a radio DJ (and for most of that time I was my own engineer – in the beginning even playing records – you remember those round things on the turntable?) and each time it was a matter of having to check the wire services (yes, we actually had teletype machines) to make sure that this was not the real thing happening. Every station has an E.B.S. monitor that can go off and when it did you had to listen for instructions. There is a special packet hanging on the wall from the FCC that has two sealed envelopes in it: one is yellow, and one is red. If you were instructed to open the yellow one – it would be quite serious, full of evacuation instructions and more. But if you had to open the red one it was much, much more than serious – it contained instructions for survival in the face of an actual impending nuclear attack or disaster that was happening. It was, and still is all about preparation – getting ready – to survive. Of course during the “cold war” back in the 80's it was really significant to be ready for that – and you knew that if you got that “red envelope” you would be saying “bye bye!”

Jesus' message that the Apostles brought to these people was the equivalent of the red envelope – survival instructions. Following the instructions meant one's eternal survival. Getting ready would mean repenting: not just feeling sorry for particular sins, but changing one's entire outlook, behavior and aims in life. Jesus' agenda left **no room for compromise, and certainly no time to waste.**

- You know what – Jesus' agenda hasn't changed, or **at least He hasn't changed it –**
- **but others have tried to,** (we are witnesses to that.)

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- Others still have said that the Holy Spirit has changed it! In fact I have heard it said that “the Holy Spirit is doing a ‘new thing.’” The Holy Spirit is doing only one thing – blessing us with salvation and grace.
- Jesus’ agenda of going to the cross – to pay the price for each of our sins – has not changed – and neither has our end of it – **repenting for our sins and turning away from wrong behavior – with God’s help.**

Jesus anticipated that some places would not welcome His message with open arms. Sadly, there are some people who would rather stay sick - than face the challenge of a new way of life, a transformed way of life, a whole new moral outlook – than what they are used to. That is why the only response that Jesus’ disciples were to have was clearly symbolic – look at verse 11 *"And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."* **“Shake the dust off”** meant essentially treating these Jewish cities **as if they were unclean, pagan cities**, the dust of which the true followers of God would not want remaining on them. They too would be unclean.

How much easier it would have been for the twelve to show resentment and anger at the rejection by those people, but there was no time to waste. Jesus’ mission was on an incredible, breathless pace – there was no time to waste and they would have to go and move on to the next place – and **may God have mercy upon those who missed their chance.**

Jesus was not sending the disciples out on a training mission –

- this was not a test – or a divine act of delegation of power.–
- Instead this was deeply symbolic act of witness to “the Israel of Jesus’ day” as to just what time it was in God’s almighty and urgent timetable. Israel’s history – in fact the history of the whole world was racing toward a dramatic climax – a showdown that would take place on a cross at Calvary.

Being obedient, the Apostles preached repentance, drove out demons and healed many sick people. Jesus gave them authority: the “right” and the “power” over evil spirits. What they would do would authenticate their preaching, and their authority. Remember, these were not just some guys off the street, but these were men who worked very closely with the Lord Jesus and knew that His power extended far beyond His personal presence. His instructions were very real. **This was not negotiable** – and they had to hurry to do the job that Jesus had given them. This was truly the coming of the Kingdom of Almighty God.

In Jesus’ sending the disciples - they were going to carry out the things that He would do if He were there, Himself. The Twelve were sent to preach the Word and lead people to trust the one and only Savior of the World – Jesus Christ – and to repent of their sins – **changing their lives – AND their behavior!** Jesus’ death on the cross was coming – and people needed to get ready. These disciples would have a further mission - after Jesus ascended to heaven. Mark

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16:20 *“And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.”*

Jesus’ detailed instruction to the disciples to go out “two by two” was a call specifically meant for that particular point in time - facing the coming crisis; the greatest crisis, the death of Jesus on the cross. We are well aware that the church itself would be faced with crisis after crisis at various points throughout its history ever since. Part of true Christian discipleship is the spiritual sensitivity and discernment to know when there is an emergency – and then - what to do regarding it.

The moral decay that is rapidly changing the face of society is frightening – where some can, and will justify “just about anything” – just because they will not submit to anyone’s authority but their own. Instead they cry out – “because I want to!” “It’s my right!” “It’s who I am, the real me!” “Accept ME just the way I am!” Oh, and the favorite retort to anyone questioning their behavior - *“Don’t judge me!* How many times have you heard that? I am NOT talking about one particular behavior – there are many behaviors where people respond *“don’t judge me.”* It might be a gambling problem, or drug and alcohol problem - *“Don’t judge me!* We could all spend hours recalling the number of times that we have heard the words of Matthew 7:1 *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”* The ones who deny the very authority of Holy Scripture – use it to justify their own needs – when it suits them.

For the ones who use Holy Scripture as a loose justification for their behavior - I direct them to the prophetic words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:3-5. I would like to share this with you and see if it doesn’t fir this day and age. *“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”* *“They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”* *“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”* Teachers, politicians, the media, Bishops, and even judges – are all compromised to say what their itching ears want to hear.

We have been called, like the twelve disciples to warn people that the world is heading rapidly in the wrong direction – and to show to the world that evil has been defeated through Jesus Christ and can be defeated again today – by standing on His Holy Word. Our focus has got to be on Jesus’ work - on Jesus’ message – without delay. Hear what Paul said to the Galatians: (Galatians 1:6-9) *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--”* ***“which is really no gospel at all.*** *Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”* *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”* *“As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”* It is not calling us to anger. It is calling us to example, example through love!

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The one true Gospel of Jesus Christ is a life giving and transforming Gospel – one that changes us and our behavior – and does not need for us to change it. Everyone is welcome in this church, everyone! There are two things that we need to check at the door: first, our sexuality and two – our unwillingness to be transformed by the love of Jesus Christ. You come into this place and be ready for God to do something with your life, as is evidenced by every single person here today; God has changed us; God has transformed us. It is not replacing the Gospel with a more “convenient” social gospel. Jesus has given us a charge – we have been called to open the “red envelope” – the instructions for survival – in Him. Isn’t it absolutely amazing that every pew here in this church has two “red envelopes?” Getting ready means repenting: not just feeling sorry for particular sins, but changing one’s entire outlook and aims in life. Jesus’ agenda is unchanging and it has no room for compromise, and there is certainly no time to waste.

(John 14:6) Jesus said on the night before He died: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Almighty God is the truth! In John 8:31-32 Jesus said *"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."* Have you ever seen the Compass Rose? That is the symbol of the Anglican Communion. It is quite beautiful. There are some Greek words that circle the compass. If we really are to be free and to call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ – true Christians – then we absolutely must follow His instructions. We are not to add to them – or to do our own thing – like Moses and the rock – but we are to be gratefully obedient – and do His Word. Remember what James 1:22 says *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*

