

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:7-13

"Share – or Shake!"

What a week it was! From Monday through Friday there were over 200 people, young and adult, who we had the privilege of sharing with. Not only sharing the Word of God, but sharing some outrageous, amazing meals. Wow, it was really special! Just seeing the smiles on everyone's faces as they learned a few new things along the way. What a journey and what a blessing.

In today's Gospel – Jesus takes His disciples and prepares them for a journey, sending them out "two by two" and it was an urgent message that He sent them with, to show that God's Kingdom was here and for the disciples to help deliver it, taking the very bare minimum with them – relying on local hospitality, and focusing on their orders. They were given specific instructions by Our Lord – to be followed to the letter. Jesus instructed them how they were specifically to carry out His instructions.

Jesus chose His twelve to be special leaders – to be "fishers of men." These were hard working men. If you shook hands with them – there were callouses to be found. These guys didn't rest easy for the day – many of them were fishermen, some of them were tax collectors, a hard job as well, not a very popular one. Many of them were fishermen, who were very familiar with their jobs, but who would also have to be special followers – people who could not only follow orders, but directions. Jesus clearly told them and *"He 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 (or shirt)." (Mark 6: 7-9)* They were called in this effort to be "public relations advance men," (it is too bad that George Blampied isn't here today – as he has acted as our public relations director for years – helping me and helping y'all to get the Word out.) These men were public relations advance men, warning people that something was about to happen and that everyone should get ready for it.

Jesus' message that the twelve brought to these people was nothing short of survival instructions. Following the instructions meant one's eternal survival. Getting ready would mean repenting: not just feeling sorry for particular sins, or "expressing regret" for straining the bonds of a relationship but changing your entire outlook and aims in life – more importantly – changing your behavior too. Jesus' agenda left no room for compromise, and no time to waste.

- You know what – Jesus' agenda hasn't changed in 2018, at least He hasn't changed it –
- but others have tried to,
- and still others have said that the "Spirit" has changed it!
- There is a very special word for that – I think it is called "malarkey!"

Jesus' agenda of going to the cross – to pay the price for each of our sins – has not changed – He went and took all of our sins – and our names were on His mind when He laid down on that

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cross – to be nailed to it. And you know what - neither has our part of it changed – repenting for our sins – and changing our sinful behavior.

Jesus knew that some places would not openly receive His message. Sadly, there are some people today who would rather stay home - doing the same old, same old - than face the “in your face” challenge of a new way of life, a transformed way of life, a whole new moral outlook – that is based on an old moral Law. That is why the only response that Jesus’ disciples were to have was clearly symbolic – shaking the dust of that place off their feet. “Shaking the dust off” meant essentially treating these Jewish cities as if they were pagan cities who were “unclean” - the dust of which the true followers of God would not want to remain on them.

Can you imagine how much easier it would have been for these twelve to show resentment and anger at the rejection by those people? Getting into an argument, or screaming match; a debate? Jesus made it clear that there was no time to waste. Jesus’ mission was on a non-stop 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 – to receive and accept His message.

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

- this was not a dry run
- or even a divine act of delegation of power –
- but instead this was a deeply symbolic act of witness to the Israel of Jesus’ day as to just what time it was in God’s Almighty calendar and urgent timetable.

It was not just Israel’s history – but in fact the history of the whole world was racing toward a dramatic climax – a showdown that would take place on a mountain in Israel, Mount Calvary.

The twelve obediently preached repentance, they drove out demons and healed many sick people. Jesus gave them authority: the “right” and the “power” over evil spirits. This power to exorcise demons would confirm their preaching, and their authority. Who were these guys to speak to evil spirits and tell them to ‘get out?’ Did you know that you can do that too? You have to use a certain Name. If you feel oppressed – say “in the Name of Jesus - leave me alone!” The spirits have to leave you alone – they have to obey the Name of Jesus. Remember, these were not just some guys off the street that Jesus chose, but these were men who worked very closely with Jesus and knew that His power stretched far beyond His personal presence. He had a charisma and when He spoke things into being – they happened. When HE told the waves and the storm to stop – it happened. His instructions were non-negotiable – and they had to hurry up and do the task at hand. This was truly the coming of the Kingdom of God.

When you go away for a weekend – how many bags do you pack? Is it just an overnight bag or is it a big one with the other that goes along with it? And then of course there are snacks for the journey – that is the way it is today. We have luggage, but these men were not supposed to take

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anything extra with them. We do not know how long they went for on this important journey. In Jesus' sending the disciples - they were going to carry out the very things that He would do if He were there in person. The Twelve were sent to preach the Word leading people to trust in the Savior of the World – Jesus Christ – and to change their behavior and sinful ways. His death on the cross was coming – and people needed to get ready.

Jesus gave detailed instruction to the disciples. Let me correct that; actually, this was to the 12 – the Apostles. We often confuse the term disciple with Apostle. There is a difference between the terms. A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ, YOU are a disciple of Jesus, but you are not an apostle. The twelve were called by God. How many were there? You only have to look at our new altar and you will see 13 triangles. The original twelve, then Judas betrayed Jesus and committed suicide, but was replaced by Matthias – chosen by God, and then Jesus called Paul – Saul of Tarsus. Those are the Apostles – everyone else are disciples. Jesus gave them strict instructions to go out two by two, a good lesson to learn when you do any kind of ministry – not a solo act – but we should be together. Jesus said, *“when two or three are gathered in my Name – there I AM in the midst of them.”* (Matthew 18:20) They had to prepare the world to face the coming crisis; the greatest crisis, the death of Jesus on the cross. The moral decay that is rapidly changing the face of society back in the first century and which continues today - is alarming. Some people can and will justify anything – just because they will refuse to 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 their favorite- *“Don't judge me!* How many times have you heard me say “Jesus loves you just the way you are – BUT He loves you too much to leave you that way?” There are some people who are afraid of that. It is called submission and they don't want to submit to anybody or anything!

Our focus has got to be on Jesus' work - on Jesus' message – without delay. Hear what the Apostle 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!”* If it is not in here (the Bible) – it is NOT! This is what we are to reproof with! If you hear a preacher saying something – check it in here. If you hear me say something – check it in here. I promise you – I will not preach to you any truth that is not in here (the Bible). That is my commitment to the people of St. Andrew's. There are preachers out there who are trying to customize the Word of God by putting or deleting parts of the text.

The one true Gospel of Jesus Christ changes us – and does not need for us to change it – or replace it with a “social gospel.” Jesus has given us a charge with instructions for survival. Remember - Jesus' agenda has not changed, despite what others keep trying to mold it to the whims of culture and then there are still others who maintain that some “spirit” is changing it!

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Well, I can tell you that it is not the Holy Spirit that is changing it. I don't know who that spirit is - but it is certainly not the Holy Spirit. 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.

Paul's words to the church in Ephesus – could just as well be words to the faithful today: *“Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be associated with them. For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light-- for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”* (Ephesians 5:5-9) That is what we talked about all this past week at VBS in the Parish Hall. Let Christ's light shine in you!

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.”* (John 14:6) Let me be clear - He is the truth! 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.”* (John 8:31-32) If we really are to be free and to call ourselves

- followers –
- disciples of Jesus Christ –
- and Christians –

then we have got to follow His instructions. We are not to add to them – or to do our own thing but we are to be gratefully obedient – and do His Word. The Apostle James says *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”* (James 1:22)

As we learned all week in SHINE – our VBS - it is time for us to get busy doing the business of the Gospel – following the instructions of Jesus - spreading the love of Christ and sharing that love by shining Christ's message in our thoughts, our words and our deeds – all in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Those are our marching orders! If people are not receptive to that message – don't get frustrated – but instead it is then time to shake off the dust - and may God have mercy upon those who missed their chance.