

Mark 6:1-29

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, 'John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half

of my kingdom.’ She went out and said to her mother, ‘What should I ask for?’ She replied, ‘The head of John the baptizer.’ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, ‘I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Have you ever had a good idea or a wise solution, but nobody will listen to you because they know you? Years ago, when I was a technical consultant, I saw that all the time. I would be brought in to find and solve problems with a company’s computer systems. After I’d done this a few times, I learned how to do it right.

In the first couple days I was there, I would take the computer staff, but not the managers, out to lunch and ask them, out of their boss’s earshot, what really needed to happen. They would tell me. I’d take notes, and often all I had to do was restate that for the manager. Because I was the outside consultant, the manager would listen to “my” brilliant insights. They would pay my company’s fees, and cheerfully implement the solution that their own staff had been telling them, in some cases for years, that they needed.^{1,2}

¹ In one spectacular example, I witnessed a manager tell an employee, “How smart can *you* be? You’re working *here*.” The employee was soon working elsewhere, at a better job.

² It didn’t always work this way, but the pattern was very real. Asking the staff what needed to happen was always helpful, even if they didn’t completely understand.

This was a pretty good racket, but the staffers I worked with this way shouldn't feel bad. Even Jesus had the same experience. Nobody in Nazareth would believe that he was a wise teacher or that he could perform miracles, because they knew him when he was growing up.

So Jesus goes to other villages, teaching and healing. The people in Nazareth missed out, frankly. And Jesus starts sending out his disciples, two by two, to go work on their own. He gives them authority over unclean spirits, things like Fear, and Greed, and Hate. He tells them to go in pairs, with just what they need, no money, no extra supplies. He tells them to stay in the first home in each village that offers them hospitality – no rude house-hopping to get the best beds or the best food.

He tells them to preach the kingdom of Heaven, to cast out demons and to heal the sick. The disciples go out and do exactly what He told them. They preach and teach the things that Jesus has taught them. They cast out a lot of unclean spirits and cure a lot of sick people.

But some people don't listen to them, just as some people don't listen to Jesus. Jesus anticipated that. Jesus is no fool. He knows how people are, particularly after his recent experience in his own hometown. He acknowledges that, even with the power that he has given his disciples to perform miracles, some people will refuse to listen to them. He tells them that, if that happens, they should literally shake the dust of that place off

their feet and go on. They should not let the apparent failure in that place continue to affect them as they try again with other people.

They will not be held responsible for how many people listen to them, but for being faithful to the mission that Jesus gave them. Being faithful is their job. The results are God's job.

Jesus is still sending people out into the world.

A while back, my wife Lisa and I drove past a church building on a main street in another part of town, near Route 315. On their sign was information about a mission they were undertaking. Every Tuesday morning, from seven to nine, they hand out free coffee to anyone who drives through their parking lot.

Do the congregation members have any illusions that everybody who gets coffee on Tuesday will fill their pews on Sunday? I certainly hope not. That would be foolish, and it's not the point. It will take more than a cup of coffee to get a single extra member for their congregation, even if they do this every week for years.

Is that person in the car going to be affected by someone kind enough to hand her a hot cup of coffee in the morning, without expecting anything in return? That could turn around her whole morning.

Is that person going to remember that congregation in a week?
“Hmmm...I wonder if they have coffee.” Maybe, but that’s not what this is about.

Will that person be more likely to let someone merge on the highway, since her morning is going better? Or give the difficult person with whom she works the benefit of the doubt? Or be nicer to her spouse or their kids when she gets home?

I suspect so.

The congregation is not benefitting directly from this program. Coffee is pretty cheap, so I’m sure it doesn’t cost much, but it does cost them money. More than that, it costs them volunteer hours – several people have to be there for probably three to four hours every Tuesday morning, week in and week out.

Obviously, they believe that it is worth it. They are changing their neighborhood, their community, one cup at a time. One person’s morning at a time. Cup by cup, they are pushing their neighborhood closer to the kingdom of God.

They may never see the results of their actions. The results happen downtown, and in people’s homes and workplaces all over Columbus. But that’s not the point.

Faithfully extending God's love and kindness is their job. The results are God's job.

Members of this congregation go to Hoge Memorial to feed hungry people some Saturday evenings. This is a good thing, and we are doing the work Jesus described in Matthew 25: literally feeding the hungry. But are we bringing those people to God, or bringing God to those people?

No.

God is already there!

We are going there to be God's hands, where God is already at work. We go together, you notice we don't go alone. Like Jesus' original disciples, we are meant to do God's work together.

That said, does it matter if the person whom we feed is an atheist? Or a person who believes that the universe owes him the meal, so he doesn't need to be thankful to anyone?

No. God is there, and God works slowly sometimes.

It's like gardening. The Apostle Paul said that he planted a seed in someone else's heart, and someone else watered, but God made things grow.³ "It's not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at the center of this process but God, who makes things grow. Planting and

³ 1 Corinthians 3:6. My paraphrase.

watering are menial servant jobs at minimum wages. What makes them worth doing is the God we are serving."⁴

John the Baptist could tell you; it isn't always easy or pleasant to be faithful. But it is better than being judged on the immediate results. It may be unpleasant to deal with someone who thinks you are a fool for helping them, but being faithful is our job. The results are God's job.

Jesus is still sending people out, and God is already present, wherever we can go.

Our local mission workers have found God already there on the Hilltop, and walking on the Crop Walk, and everywhere else we go. Wherever God's children are, God is there at work. God works in the hearts and minds of people. It is not our job to make God work in someone's heart. That's not even within our power.

I can't tell you how God changes a person. It's probably different for each person. As an old hymn says, "I know not how the Spirit moves, convicting men of sin,"⁵ but I can tell you that it happens.

Mostly it happens behind the scenes, and we don't see it, but, sometimes, we get to watch. Sometimes we get to see a life transformed.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 7-8, *The Message*.

⁵ Daniel W Whittle, "I Know Whom I Have Believed," 1883.

Whether it happens overnight, or it takes a lifetime, it is an amazing thing to see the Holy Spirit in someone's life.

Jesus is still sending people out. People like us.

Being faithful to God's mission for the church and for Christians is our job. The results are God's job.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.