

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

STAYING ON MESSAGE, EVEN AMONG SNOBS

Mark 6:1-13

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Analysis by Ronald C. Neustadt

1He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2On 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! 3Is 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 offense at him. 4Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." 5And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11If 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." 12So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and

cured them.

DIAGNOSIS: Off Message

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Discounting What Jesus Does and Says*

The people in Jesus' hometown "took offense at / stumbled over" (ἐσκανδαλίζοντο) him, Mark tells us. What they stumbled over was his lack of pedigree. They couldn't get past the fact that he was "the carpenter." They even called him not "Joseph and Mary's son," but "Mary's son," another put-down. Snobs they were. And their snobbery prevented them from rejoicing in Jesus and the life-giving, liberating works he had done.

Sometimes we're just such snobs ourselves. Witness the attention we sometimes give to the religious messages of entertainers and athletes and other "celebrities," even when their message is not honest to God Good News. Witness how dismissive we can be of those who do speak the Good News of Jesus, but who are not celebrated personalities. Or if the music isn't to our liking, or if the messenger is too "low church" (or too "high church"), we can reject the message and the messenger alike.

Likewise, we can also be on the receiving end of the snobbery. When Jesus sent out the twelve to cast out unclean spirits, he anticipated that they would be rejected by some just as he had been. We, too, may sometimes get rejected, along with the Good News we bring. And sometimes, in a desire to be accepted, we get "off message." That is, sometimes we water down the Good News or we substitute a different message altogether. Or we get enmeshed with those who will not receive us. We fight and argue with them instead of just "shaking off the dust as a witness" to them and moving on.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Having No Faith*

Behind our reluctance to do the mission we've been sent to do, is the same issue that's behind the snobbery: It's "unbelief" (6:6). When we do not announce the Good News of Jesus Christ; when we do not bring healing and freedom from demons to others; when, in our snobbery, we discount those who do bring the Good News and the healing that flows from it, we demonstrate our unbelief, our lack of trust in the One who was willing to become a nobody in order to bring God's Good News to nobodies and somebodies alike. We are demonstrating that our trust really lies in whatever it is that we think makes someone a "somebody"—wealth, athletic ability, power, intelligence, pedigree...

Likewise, when we don't pass on the message because we fear rejection, what lies behind our fear is that same unbelief. It's trust that we lack—specifically, trust that the forgiveness and healing and freedom from demons that Jesus offers us is, in fact, God's own offer to us and that it is trustworthy.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Being Discounted Ourselves*

The trouble with not trusting someone who offers you a gift is that you don't get what the giver wants you to have. When the Giver is God, and the gift is forgiveness of sins (and the healing and freedom that comes from it), not trusting the Giver means that our only future is to return to the dust. That much God has made clear to us from the beginning.

PROGNOSIS: On Message

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Going to the Dust for Us*

But behold what God chooses to do: God chooses to follow us all the way into that dust. Jesus does move on from Nazareth, but he

does not simply “move on.” He stays on message as he moves on. He goes about among the villages teaching (6:6). And he stays on message as he moves on to Jerusalem, healing and forgiving, and casting out demons all along the way. Even when the opposition that began with the religious leaders continues with his hometown neighbors and ends up coming from his closest followers, Jesus keeps offering mercy and life to all, until he is killed for doing so.

He had even said he knew it would be “necessary” (8:31) for him to go that far if he were ever to reach us, headed-for-the-dust discounters that we can be. And only after three days did it begin to become clear to snobs and fearful folks like us that he had the authority of God to make such an offer.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trusting*

When his Spirit gets it through to us that we are loved that much, we find ourselves echoing the centurion who stood at the foot of his cross. We find ourselves calling him “God’s son” (8:39), instead of derisively dismissing him the way his hometown neighbors did (calling him “Mary’s son”). That is, we find ourselves trusting him. We find ourselves trusting his promise of forgiveness, trusting that the healing and freedom from demons he mercifully offers to us and to all is, in fact, God’s own offer.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Staying on Message*

As we trust, our trust results in action. We rejoice when we see people being forgiven and healed and freed from demons in Jesus’ name, regardless of the pedigree of the agent who delivers the message.

Not only that; when we trust Jesus because he stayed on message, we stay on message ourselves. Lack of response (or even rejection) does not deter us from the mission. We may move on

(in order to bring God's offer of healing to as many as possible), but even then we don't do so without first shaking off the dust from our feet "as a witness" (εἰς μαρτύριον) to our rejecters, reminding them once again that what God is offering them is rescue from simply returning to the dust.

So in words and in deeds we deliver the message of God's mercy that has been made known to us in Jesus. And the healing continues.