

SO I CAN PREACH THERE ALSO

Mark 1:16-39

Key Verse: 1:38

“Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’”

In the previous passage we learned how the good news of Jesus Christ began. When John the Baptist, a righteous man, and a prophet, was put in prison by the cruel and adulterous King Herod, people felt intimidated by the power of evil. It seemed that hope was extinguished. In light of the turmoil in our own country, we can understand. Yet, it was at this time, Jesus started his Messianic ministry, proclaiming the good news of God. He said: “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (15) These days people seem overwhelmed by terrible news. Last week as a stylist was cutting my hair, she complained about many awful things. After listening for a few minutes, I asked, “Is there any good news?” She looked surprised, began to remember good things, and smiled. People need to hear good news. The good news is the coming of God’s kingdom through Jesus Christ. In today’s passage we see how Jesus brought the good news of God to people who were suffering: Jesus called his first disciples; Jesus taught the word of God; Jesus drove out demons; Jesus healed many sick people. In this way the kingdom of God came upon them. The kingdom of God is not theoretical, but very practical. The kingdom of God comes as God’s word is taught and suffering people are cared for. The kingdom of God advances in adverse circumstances. As we start the new year, we have many ideas and aspirations. Let us learn what Jesus did, and how this can guide us.

First, Jesus called kingdom workers (16-20). In the beginning of his ministry, Jesus could have done many things to establish his base. He could have set up an office in Jerusalem, rallied discontented people and started a government takeover. But to our surprise he went into Galilee and called a few ordinary people as his disciples. It seemed misdirected and ineffective. But this was God’s great wisdom to carry out his world salvation plan. Jesus raised disciples from the beginning. Raising disciples of Jesus is not just a UBF

motto. It is Jesus' method. We need to learn from Jesus how his ministry was focused and how he raised his disciples.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen (16). It is amazing that the Son of God humbled himself to walk beside the Sea of Galilee, looking for people. Jesus did not send a text or email from heaven. Jesus did not post announcements on social media and wait for people to come to him. Instead, he himself went in person to people's workplaces, including the seashore. The fishing business was thriving at the Sea of Galilee. As water from the Jordan River flowed from north to south it kept the lake ever fresh and a good habitat for fish. Despite this, it was not easy for fishermen to make a living. They needed government issued fishing licenses and were heavily taxed.

When Jesus saw Simon and Andrew, they were working hard in a survival mode without any real hope for the future. They must have suffered from meaninglessness and lacked direction. Jesus said, "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people" (17). It was a most gracious invitation. It offered meaning, hope, and a direction for life. It was an invitation to enter Jesus' school of discipleship. Jesus did not ask for a resume or give them an entrance exam. All they needed to do was to follow Jesus. "Follow me" means that they would learn from Jesus; so they needed to be humble. Those who are proud and insist on their own opinions cannot be good disciples of Jesus. While it is good for a person to be intellectual, educated and well-trained, these are not essential. What is essential is to listen to Jesus and follow him. Of course, this requires commitment.

Jesus' calling is accompanied by a promise: "I will send you out to fish for people." A translation closer to the original Greek is: "I will make you become fishers of men" (ESV). What does it mean to become "fishers of men"? This is a metaphor which describes, in a way they could understand, how they would serve God in the future. They would catch people, who were drowning in the sea of sin and death and bring them to the kingdom of God. They would be sent to rescue people from eternal condemnation and bring them into eternal life. This is the most noble calling God can bestow on a

human being. It is the most meaningful way a person can invest their lives. No one can take this calling upon themselves. It is a gift of God by grace. Jesus was offering this gift to them. The words "I will..." tell us that Jesus had taken the responsibility to do this; he would accomplish it. All they needed to do was trust him. Our world desperately needs kingdom workers. Outwardly, people try to seem okay. If we ask, "How are you?" they may say, "I'm fine! I'm good!" But in reality, they suffer from agonies, sorrows and pains. They need Jesus. Jesus wanted to raise his disciples as kingdom workers, to serve people as he did. As they followed Jesus, they grew to be like him and became a source of blessing. Jesus still raises kingdom workers. Listen to him, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (17, ESV). Do you hear his call?

How did Simon and Andrew respond? "At once they left their nets and followed him" (18). Then Jesus saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them. They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Jesus (19-20). Jesus' words captured their hearts. They perceived a new life with a new hope and a bright future in Jesus. So they left everything and followed him. Their decision was voluntary, and they fully committed themselves to Jesus. When these ordinary people followed Jesus, they were transformed into great saints whom God used to change the course of history.

Second, Jesus taught with authority, drove out demons, and healed the sick (21-34). Jesus and his new disciples went to Capernaum, which became the center of his Galilean ministry. When the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach (21). People were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law (22). Jesus' teaching is distinguished by its authority. The main source of his authority comes from his person. He is the Son of God, as God declared from heaven at his baptism (11). As the Son, Jesus is in very nature God. When Jesus speaks, it is God himself speaking. His word carries the same almighty power that created heaven and earth, and which gives life to the dead. Jesus' words penetrated into people's hearts and exposed and judged their thoughts and attitudes (Heb 4:12). People could not hide themselves or ignore what Jesus said. Jesus' words brought forth a response.

In contrast, Mark notes the teachers of the law were not recognized for their authority. It was not just because they were merely human. There was a real problem with their teaching. They should have taught the word of God. Instead, they emphasized man-made rules and regulations and human traditions (7:7-9, 13). For example, regarding keeping the Sabbath they added many human rules, making 1,261 specific regulations (2:24). They judged as “guilty of sin” anyone who broke them. They placed heavy burdens on people who were already struggling hard to survive in the world. They were legalistic killjoys who had no concern for suffering people. However, Jesus was different. Jesus taught the word of God. The word of God helps us to find meaning and life direction. The word of God gives us true freedom and joy. The word of God makes us wise for salvation and enables us to do good works. The word of God plants true hope in the kingdom of God. When people heard Jesus’ words their souls revived. They were amazed by his teaching, saying, “Wow! That’s what we really needed!”

When we observe Jesus’ life, we find that he taught the word of God diligently. Why did he spend so much time doing this? Jesus knew that people really need the word of God. Human beings suffer most, not from a lack of material things or dire circumstances, but from a lack of God’s word. Long ago, Amos prophesied: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.’ In that day ‘the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst’” (Am 8:11-13). Is this not happening today? This tells us why we should study and teach the words of God diligently, especially to young people. The word of God contains all kinds of hidden treasures. We should discover these treasures and share them with others. It is not a small matter, but the way to great and abundant blessings. The word of God gives life to our souls.

When Jesus taught the words of God, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit began to react. He cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know

who you are—the Holy One of God” (24). This was not a confession of faith. It was demonic resistance to Jesus. We should acknowledge that demons are real and they are working invisibly to cause all kinds of trouble. They are characterized by deception and violence. They suppress the truth with lies. There is no human means by which to defeat them. They are not afraid of counseling or medication. But the demon was afraid of Jesus, the Son of God, who had power to destroy him. Jesus saw that if the demon were driven out, the man would be normal and healthy. Jesus rebuked the demon sternly, “Be quiet! Come out of him!” (25) The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek (26). People were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him” (27). Jesus’ word of truth has power to drive out demons and give us true freedom. We can fight against evil spirits with Jesus’ word of truth, depending on his power. Jesus’ coming brought a paradigm shift. News about Jesus spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee (28).

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew (29). Though home visiting, Jesus wanted to know his disciples better. There, he found a problem. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. They immediately told Jesus about her (30). Jesus was mindful of this one older woman and healed her. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them (31). Jesus had worked hard all day long. As the sun set that evening, which marked the end of the Sabbath day, people brought all the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus (32). The whole town gathered at the door (33). Jesus could have said, “I need rest. Please return tomorrow.” But Jesus, out of his great compassion, accepted them as they were, and healed them one by one (Lk 4:40).

These days, so many people suffer from Covid-19, diabetes, hepatitis, arthritis, osteoporosis, psoriasis, cancer, and so on. There are also mental and emotional illnesses: anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression, autism, and more. Then there are spiritual diseases: selfishness, victim’s mentality, fatalism and so on. I do not know anyone who is healthy in every aspect. We all need healing in some way. How can we be healed? We should come to Jesus. Jesus can heal us. He may heal us directly, or he may

heal us through doctors and medicine. In Jesus' society people were poor and had no proper health care. In America today, we have many good doctors, hospitals, and medicines, given to us by God for our healing. We should make the most of these resources. But ultimately, we need Jesus. Jesus took up all our infirmities and diseases in his body so that we may be healed (Mt 8:17). Let us come to Jesus.

Third, Jesus had God's vision through prayer (35-39). Jesus worked hard late into the night to teach the word of God, drive out demons, and heal many sick people. So he could have slept in the next day. But verse 35 says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." Jesus prioritized personal prayer with God. Through prayer, Jesus renewed his strength and received God's wisdom. Through prayer, Jesus overcame temptations and fought to advance the gospel. Through prayer, Jesus listened to God's voice and held onto God's vision. Then he could do what God wanted him to do instead of what people wanted him to do.

A few hours later, when they woke up, Simon and his companions found themselves surrounded by people who were looking for Jesus. So they went to Jesus, and exclaimed, "Everyone is looking for you!" (36-37) When Jesus became popular, the disciples were excited, thinking that they also became somebodies. They might have anticipated spending the day basking in the respect of grateful villagers. Jesus' reply was a surprise. In verse 38 he said, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." Then Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in the synagogues, and driving out demons (39).

No sooner had Jesus experienced great success than he was ready to move on to the nearby villages. This is extraordinary. In times of success it is so easy to forget God, settle down and live comfortably. Many people pray wholeheartedly during times of great need, but much less when their needs are met. However, Jesus prayed in the time of success and followed God's direction to go to the nearby villages. Why? He wanted to preach the good news to those who were languishing in this hard world. By preaching the good news, he wanted to rescue lost souls and advance God's kingdom. He

had come to reclaim what was lost at the fall and would press on until it was accomplished. Here we see the vision that drove Jesus' daily life. It is a vision that he wants to share with his disciples. That is why Jesus commanded his disciples to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation (Mk 16:15). It's a wonderful vision, but not easy to carry out. Especially these days, we are confined and limited. However, if we have God's vision for perishing souls, we will find a way to preach the gospel. What really matters is not the situation but having God's vision. Let us have God's vision to preach the gospel and advance his kingdom.

What could be our "nearby villages"? In Jesus' time, "nearby villages" may have included those within a day's walk. Today "nearby villages" are virtually any place in the world where we now have access through online platforms. People are crying to hear the gospel. We should meet them by whatever means possible and preach the gospel to them. Paul asked, "How can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" (Ro 10:14b-15a) When we go and preach the gospel, God does life-giving work.

Today we have seen how Jesus advanced the kingdom of God, by calling disciples, preaching, and teaching, driving out demons and healing the sick. While all of these are significant, Jesus seems to summarize his work with the word "preach." We have many things to do. Sometimes we do what we want to do. Other times we do what other people press us to do, or what the situation seems to demand us to do. But ultimately, we need to do what God wants us to do. As followers of Jesus, we need to embrace God's vision for us to preach the gospel to all creation. Let us pray to do so. Do not be surprised if God sends you out to a "nearby village."