



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London

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Diocese of Chelmsford

## Sermon

(Mark 6. 1-13)

**Trinity 6 – Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

In the breathless hectic Gospel of Mark, there is an urgency about things. He uses the word 'immediately' no less than eight times and portrays Jesus as a man of action who moves "immediately" from one healing to another, from one encounter to another.

The instructions that Jesus gave his disciples before sending them out carried that same sense of urgency. Don't waste time gathering your inventory. Travel light. Don't get drawn in to lengthy arguments - if they don't want to know then shake the dust off your feet and move on. Don't move from house to house – just stop where you first arrive, do what you need to do and then move on.

Clearly, we live in different times. So these instructions need to be heard within a slightly different context. Some things will still apply. As Tom Wright says, "These are emergency instructions for a swift and dangerous mission, not a programme for the continuing life of the church after Easter," and, "these commands are specific to Jesus' own day and the setting of his mission in first century Palestine." But there is much that we can draw from this passage that should shape our mission now among the people we serve.

God's Mission is global and cosmic, but it is also social and personal. Here, the Saviour of the World, the Son of God, went about among the villages teaching, and then he multiplied that mission by sending out the disciples so that his message might seep into the cracks and crevices and forgotten corners of first century Palestine. Here Jesus sends out his disciples to go knocking on doors – to go to households, families, individuals – with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Throughout the life of Jesus, we see him valuing the small, the vulnerable and the marginal. He still does, and so must we.

But Jesus could have potentially doubled the impact his disciples had if he'd sent them out individually. However, he sent them out two by two. No disciple was sent out to minister alone. Our common life, our generous collaboration with one another is the only context for our discipleship. There is no 'I' in church. We were always called to travel well together. I think as a church - particularly when it comes to the ordained - I think we lost sight of that for many years. Many clergy operated like lone rangers. They were the professionally religious and they gathered to themselves many of the tasks of ministry. But now I think, as the writer Walter Bruggemann has put it, that we are being "regathered in obedience". I think we are rediscovering that call to community, to doing things together, to fellowship. That means standing together; bearing with one another; supporting one another; praying for one another, living and worshipping and acting as one, being regathered in obedience to God. As a diocese, we have said in the past that collaboration and connectedness are vital to avoid isolation. There must be no solo ministers and no solo parishes. We recognise – especially at this time – that such collaboration requires a measure of grace and generosity. It requires that we show kindness, mutual respect, gentleness and humility. But there is no doubt that the intention – as far as Jesus is concerned – is that no disciple should minister alone or should have to.

Jesus also told the disciples to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts. Sandals were ok - but only one tunic. The disciples whom Jesus sent out left quite a lot behind. Peter said to Jesus, "We have left everything to follow you!" They left their boats, their fishing nets, their security, their income, their families and their friends. They left so much in order to follow Jesus. Our society is constantly changing and - if we are to be effective - then the church will need to change too. And for many people, that process of change will feel like a leaving behind of things cherished, and a loss of things for which we may grieve. E. Stanley Jones famously warned that the Church which "marries itself to the present age will find itself a widow in the next." But former Bishop of Maidstone Graham Cray added that the Church that "fails to have even a close relationship with the present age will have no children in the next." As well as travelling well together, we will have to learn to travel light. The Church of England report Mission-Shaped Church said that "a missionary church seeks to shape itself in relation to the culture in which it is located or to which it is called. Whenever it is called to be cross-cultural then its long-term members or initial team lay aside their cultural preferences about church to allow the emergence of a form or style of church to be shaped by those they are seeking to reach. If a church is long established, then it evaluates itself in relation to the culture of the community it serves, and strips away whatever is not required by the gospel." I think – if I am honest – we have not yet grasped this nettle. Instead, we have allowed the culture of the church to drift further and further away from the consciousness and comprehension of most people.

Finally, the passage tells us that the disciples "cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them." The disciples of Jesus Christ have always been in the business of healing, wholeness and salvation. We are good news people and I am so thankful for the huge amount of work that the church does in every community. Visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, and supporting those who are struggling. Imagine for a moment that you were commissioned to advertise the church. What would you say?

Who runs free holiday clubs for two million children and young people? Who runs fifty thousand youth clubs? Who has more than twice as many youth workers as the government?

Who? Who cares? Christians through Churches.

Who visits 450,000 housebound people a week? Who visits 350,000 people in hospitals a week? Who runs 12,000 drop-in centres and 20,000 parent and toddlers groups?

Who? Who cares? Christians through Churches.

Actually, the numbers are made up, but they aren't that far off. The Church may struggle in places, but it still delivers 'love' in huge measures and does more for British communities than any other charity or voluntary organisation.

The context in which Jesus sends us out may well be very different from the situation those first disciples found themselves in. But there is much that we can draw from their example that should shape our mission now among the people we serve. Amen.