“God’s Creating Spirit: Our Calling to Fulfill”
Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, 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 offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, 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.

I know that as we prepare to come to the Lord’s Table this morning, we bring in our hearts a whole variety of feelings and hopes and questions and fears and dreams. Some of us are enjoying what might feel like a more normal 4th of July weekend. Others are off and traveling, seeing family and friends at long last. Some are wondering what the new school year will bring. Some are carrying heavy burdens—the ones we talk about and the ones known only to God. Some of us are weighed down by negativity and cynicism and the wellspring of our soul has gone dry. Some are fearful for our nation and for our church, anxiety constricting our hearts and souring our joy. And I suppose that all of us so want this awful virus to be behind us, yet still are wondering where all this is going and unclear about what lies ahead.

To all of us this morning, Jesus is saying ‘come, all of you, pull up a chair at my table.’ Come, just as you are. Come with all those thoughts and dreams and questions and fears. Come. This is how we bring ourselves before the throne of God to find nourishment for our hearts and minds and souls. Here, in this simple bread and cup, you will find forgiveness and hope, bread for the journey and a full measure of amazing grace.

One of the things I love about Mark’s story of the call of the first disciples is the way it presents them as ordinary folks. We lose some of the power of the Gospel story if we imagine these first 12 as super humans or super heroes. We know their names. We’ve seen them in paintings and stained glass. We’re tempted to contrast ourselves to them and we can never measure up, right?

But the Gospel story is actually trying to draw us in to see ourselves in it. It’s like a family picture with a place just for our face to also appear. How does it do this? Well, it starts in Jesus’ hometown, a place where all these folks have been known since birth. Everyone knows what they’re really like—their good qualities and the ways they mess up or fall short. The twelve are known for who they really are. They’re just folks, ordinary folks, like everyone in town.

Now, Jesus is giving them a very special job to do. He’s putting together his first team to go out and join him in his ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. God’s theology of risk, it’s been called, risking to entrust the likes of you and me with the work of God’s kingdom. It’s not going to be easy, or particularly rewarding. Some people will welcome you, some will not. Some will receive what you’re offering, some will not.

And then there’s that really intriguing part about how they should present themselves: no bread, no bag, no money, sandals, just one tunic. What’s that about? I think Jesus is saying: be humble, be transparent. Don’t hide behind your stuff or your pretenses or your fears. Don’t try to present yourself as more special or more holy than the people you meet. As Scripture tells us in another place: don’t presume to be wiser than you are. I think Jesus is saying: be yourself, disciple. Be authentic. Be real. Be trustworthy. Be yourself and let God’s creating Spirit work through you.

And at the same time, he’s saying: never underestimate what that Spirit working through you can do. Never miss an opportunity to witness to the power of God’s renewing love. Let it show forth in who you are, how you act, how you treat others, how you give and how you receive. Claim the gifts God is bestowing upon you to heal, to teach, to forgive, to make whole. Embrace the risk of living into this journey with me.
He's saying: you may think you are ordinary, and actually you are, AND you are a beloved child of the Creator of the universe, and you have been given gifts that are intended to be used to build up the Body of Christ, and you need to go use them. People need you. The world needs you. My mission on earth needs you.

So, with everything that’s already on your heart this day, find a quiet moment to also reflect a bit in God’s presence: What are you good at? What are you drawn toward? What are you afraid to actually do, but really want to do or say? How can you use the gifts God has given you in line with justice? In a spirit of kindness? How might you see your role in God’s creating work of living, witnessing, and serving “on earth as in heaven?”

And so, as you come to the Sacrament this day, as disciples, as followers, as friends, lift up your hearts and offer yourselves again into the life-giving power of God. As you come, lift up your heads and look deep into the heart of God. Let us pray to be open and honest and real. Let yourself trust that God is at work in your life and in this world and in the church. See how God’s Creating Spirit is moving and working to bring forth new life within us and all around.

Thanks be to God! AMEN

Notes:


Derek Maul. Florida Conference, UMC.