

What do you think when you hear this gospel? Do you have sympathy for Jesus as he goes to his hometown, teaches, and then is rejected? Are you angry at the people in the synagogue because we know who Jesus is and they still see him as the carpenter, and they just don't see who Jesus is? Are you inspired as Jesus provokes the gathering as he effectively accuses them of dishonour and in doing so accuses them of being unfaithful? And what of the disciples as they go into the villages two by two with only the authority of Jesus, a staff, a tunic, and sandals? Could you go into the world like that?

There are a number of themes that we hear in the gospel today, but Jesus is on mission. He is on a mission to bring people back to God, he is on a mission to open their eyes to see who he is and to see the salvation that is offered through him, and he does this sometimes by provoking people into thought and in doing so he provokes people into action. We, ourselves, are provoked in this gospel as the disciples are called to go into the world.

I wonder what the twelve would have been thinking. Jesus had just been to the synagogue and had been rejected by his own people, he had been rejected by his community and by his neighbours. They knew him as the carpenter, a worker of wood, and the twelve would have seen a contrast between Jesus who **they** knew and Jesus that the people of his hometown knew. The twelve would have been confused as to why the people could not see Jesus who they knew and yet here he was, giving them the authority to go into the villages to heal the sick and to cast out demons. How would they have approached their task? With fear, since they had just seen Jesus rejected by his own people, or with faith as they are authorised by Jesus, or with a combination of both.

When **we** are called to mission, I suspect this is how we are, because human nature is like that. Humans generally assess a situation before they act, we are generally cautious. The question for us to think about then is this: did fear stop the disciples from being sent out? The answer was of course no; because they knew that they had been given Jesus' authority to go into the world, they were empowered by God the Holy

Spirit, authorised by God the Son, so that they would be able to do the work that God the Father had intended.

So then, does fear stop **us** from God's mission? That is the question and challenge for us to think about today. The disciples were called to go into the world and preach repentance; that is to preach a turning back to God; and we, as the disciples of this time and place, are called to do the same thing: we are called to bring people to God. The mission that **we** have in the world in which we live is to turn people back to God. We do this by word, and action, and neither can be separated. Our words and actions must agree! We are at once missional through our action, and we are evangelists with our words, those around us see and hear the Good News of salvation through us.

The mission that we have, today, in our time, is through the same authority that was given to the disciples, and that authority is Christ. We are a people saved and redeemed, that is joined to God, through the cross. We are given a new life through the cross, and it was Christ on the cross, through grace, who has given that authority. The disciples healed and

cast out demons with the authority of Jesus and without that authority the things they did would not have been possible.

Today it is our turn to accept the authority of Christ, as people empowered by the Holy Spirit with various gifts and talents and to go to the world with words and action to show Christ, to tell of Christ and to be Christ to those who we meet.

The disciples did not fear their task, at least in Mark's gospel there is no evidence of that, the disciples were common everyday people who did not fear because they knew of God's grace through Jesus; and through that grace there was no fear, that grace was the grounding that they had to complete their task of having people turn back to God – they had no need of fear; and neither do we. We need not fear rejection, they went out empowered, they went out with trust, and they went out with Christ's authority, and the lingering question for us today is this: “will we accept that same mission, will we use grace to bring people back to God?”

Jesus, at the beginning of this Gospel, provokes the people in his hometown with his teaching in the synagogue; is it our turn to provoke the world in which we live, so that people might hear the message of grace through the Good News of salvation.

How might people hear the message of salvation? Invite your friends or neighbours to church so that they can be part of a community of grace, to dispel the idea that church is a strange or foreign place, because it isn't. Make people aware of the issues that face the community and how the grace freely given through the cross impacts those issues in people's lives. Talk about the freedom and hope that is given through Jesus' death and resurrection. In short, be disciples, be like the twelve: go out in fully dependent on Jesus and tell the story of salvation through word and action. That way people will come to know Jesus through us and be joined to God. Amen.