

Ezekiel 2:1-5; Psalm 123
2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I was 18 years old I got my first “real” job. I mean I had been mowing lawns and baby sitting, and all those things, but this was a real job with a pay check from a bank. This was really cool. It was one of those places that only sell jeans. Something like The Gap, only it was a *Gap Wanna Be*. A little tiny place in a strip mall, right next to the grocery store. My sister had found me the job. She was working in the nearby grocery store at the time.

I have to admit to you that this was not exactly a really good job. O.K. But it was my really first good job. Now when I look back on it, and I see that we waited on customers, straightened the jeans, and that we stocked the shelves. Basically, what we did most of the time was sit around because we didn’t often have customers! So – this was my first job and I thought it was so exciting. Do you know the best part of this job? 10% discount on all merchandise! I can tell you that most of my paycheck when right back into the register so I could have the coolest jeans.

In the past year that I have been here, and I am sure none of you have noticed, but I am just a little bit of a “control freak.” Just a little. But I did well on that first job, because whenever I was there all of the jeans were folded perfectly! They were all in the right size slot. Don’t you hate when you go to the store and you find this great pair of jeans and they only have them in the wrong size and they are all in the space where your size should be. I hate that. I mean, I stacked those jeans perfectly, the money in the register always balanced to the penny, and even the windows were sparkling clean. Nothing was ever out of place. I was never late for work. I never called in sick. I smiled and was very helpful to the customer. In other words, I was the perfect employee. Or at least I thought I was the perfect employee’s. And then one day I saw my sister at the grocery store before I went in to work and she said, “Well, I just wanted to let you know before you go in there that you are going to be fired today.” “Fired! Why? I work so hard. I do every thing right.” She looked at me, with this sad, cynical grin on her face and said, “Why are you so upset? It is not a big deal. Someone has been swiping jeans from the store, they can’t figure out who it is, so the company policy is to fire everyone.” She continued, “Even my friend who is the manager, is being fired today too. That is just the way it is.” Don’t be upset! Not a big deal. How will I ever get another job? I will be branded as a thief. My life is over. I was a little dramatic back then. I am not that way anymore.

Now I tell you this story because it relates well to the second half of today’s gospel. Jesus sent the disciples out on mission work. That is a pretty big job for a bunch of guys who have been getting it wrong for the last five chapters. I mean, just two weeks ago we heard how Jesus rebuked them for having so little faith when there was storm and their boat was tossed by the

waves. But despite their shortcomings and their mistakes, Jesus is about to send them out on this mission trip. It would be good for us to remember when we feel that we are unworthy to carry the message to others, Jesus calls us to share the good news not because we are perfect, but because we are loved by God.

Jesus didn't send the disciples out unprepared. I know it sounds like it, no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, but in their culture, the responsibility for hospitality was so strong, that when a stranger came into town, people would actually argue with each other about who got to take him home. So it really wasn't that he was sending them out unprepared. He definitely wanted to prepare them for the reality that they might be rejected. No matter what they did, no matter how well they preached, they would fail in some places. He was equipping them for ministry in the real world.

In the first half of the gospel we kind of see why. Jesus goes to his hometown where all of the people know him and he is rejected. So he knows what it is like to preach and not be heard. He knows what it is like to be rejected. But you know, I suppose really, Jesus was preparing the disciples for mission work from the first day that he called them. He called them not as powerful people, not as part of the educated elite. He chose them not for their status, but for who they were. He saw the gift in them, even if no one else did.

In today's passage, he called them again. This time he called them to send them out into the world to preach repentance and to heal the sick. They were first called at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, they followed him, they listened to him and they saw what he did. Now Jesus is sending them out on a mission of their own. He sent them out two by two, so that they would have company on the road. So they would be able to encourage each other when times got rough and so that they would be safe.

It would be good for us to remember this when we go out into the world. We need to remember that Christianity happens in community and having Christian companions on the mission that we are sent out on is essential. Jesus told the disciples to take only the minimum of stuff. As I said, hospitality was expected when you walked into a town, people would offer you hospitality. It was just a very strong part of their culture. But also he told them to take only the minimum amount of stuff because he knew that they needed to rely on God, not on themselves.

It would be good for us to remember that the Church is not the building, or the lawns, or the lighting, or anything of those things, the real Church is us. The Church is the people, you and me and what we do when we leave this building. That is what the Church is. We go out into the world and we preach the good news, relying on God to carry us through whatever troubles and triumphs come along. Jesus made sure to prepare them for failure, not because he expected them to fail, but because he knew what it was like.

When I was fired from that job, at which I was the "perfect employee," I was devastated. I moped around the house. I hid in my room and cried and wailed. And, eventually, I got over it.

But you know, I carried with me, in the back of my mind, the idea that I must have done something. There must be something wrong with me, that I got fired. I became very concerned with what other people thought about me. I became a “people pleaser” to make sure that this horrible thing never happened to me again. It took me a long time to realize that it was not about me. It was just the company policy. That was the cheapest way for them to get rid of someone who was stealing—to just fire everybody and to hire a whole new crew. Its not like it took a lot of skills to do this job, no matter what I say about being such a great employee. Now I realize that it wasn’t about me.

The thing is that now I am leaving to go back to school and (I am going to cry and I am sorry.) then go out from school, into the ministry. I have to be dedicated to proclaiming the gospel. That is what I am called to do. Whether I exceed, or I fail, cannot be my primary concern. My first concern is faithfulness to the gospel. So it is for everyone of us, because we are all ministers sharing the good news wherever we go. Even if all it is, is that you let someone go before you in line. Even if all it is, is that you say thank you to someone who works in a store who hasn’t heard a thank you in days and days. You are ministering, you are spreading the good news of Jesus Christ everywhere you go.

If we become too concerned about whether we are accepted, or approved of, or if people like us, we will lose sight of the gospel. That is what Jesus prepared the disciples for. He believed that they would do their best. He knew that they could preach forgiveness of sins, he gave them power of evil spirits and their responsibility was to do those things. But Jesus also knew that not everyone would accept their message. They must not be afraid to offend, they must not worry about not being accepted, they must not lose sight of the gospel.

This is the most important thing that we can learn from today’s Gospel lesson. We have to continue to share the good news of Jesus Christ no matter what happens. There will be people who won’t accept us, there will people who won’t accept me—I know that is hard to believe, but there are going to be people who just won’t hear me when I speak. We won’t always be successful, but if we keep our focus on Jesus and proclaiming the gospel, God will go with us. The Holy Spirit will carry us through.

So today when we go out from here, fed by this food, we will keep proclaiming the good news. that we are loved by our creator, saved from our sins by the Grace of Jesus Christ and by his faithfulness.

Amen.

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