

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a bible open to Mark 6 and a lighted candle at the center of your group. Any group members who are wearing symbols of Christian discipleship can identify them.

LEADER: Blessed be God, who blesses us with every spiritual blessing.

ALL: In Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son.

LEADER: We have wholeness and forgiveness of sins.

ALL: In Jesus Christ, God's self-giving Son.

LEADER: In the fullness of time may the Holy One gather us together in unity.

ALL: In Jesus Christ, who reveals the good news of God's love.

LEADER: We are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

ALL: In Jesus Christ, whose words reveal the way to holiness and wholeness.

Amen.

Jesus faces demons, fever, a man with leprosy, opposition from other teachers in his ministry in Galilee, anxiety from his family. In Sunday's gospel Jesus sends the twelve out to do the same—preach repentance, cast out demons, anoint the sick. Imagine Jesus sending you out in your neighborhood to do what he has done in his early ministry.

In Minneapolis where I live, we face inflammatory angers at

SUNDAY

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our police and slow community work to end police stops for minor problems that lead to shootings. We get tested for fevers frequently, not as much as athletes who want to play sports. We discover the panicked may fear contagion less for themselves than for those whom they love. The daily obituaries describe incredible people.

In the 50 years prior to the first community of Sisters of St. Joseph, the people of southern France experienced two waves of bubonic plague and one of famine. Those details in our history meant little until now. In the New York Times Elizabeth Dias and Audra S. Burch write about the pandemic, "It has been a near death experience, for those lucky enough to survive. People have found themselves close to life's deepest questions."

As if a pandemic were not enough, we in the United States watched an invasion of our capitol. Our democracy that seemed so



invincibly sacred and certain suddenly seemed fragile. Masks and vaccinations seemed no brainers before they became political symbols. Some of us have found resilience, some anger, others sadness at so many losses.

Today the other masked lady in my apartment elevator asked me how I am. "OK," I say. "And you?" "Good enough," she says and adds, "We are all carrying a lot."

● **How have you been? How has the year transformed you? What are you carrying?**



GOSPEL

Jesus sends out the twelve.

NARRATOR: Jesus called the twelve, 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.

JESUS: 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.

NARRATOR: 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.

Mark 6.7-13



What is our mission as Jesus' disciples today?

Jesus' disciples have followed him through the villages of Galilee as he preaches the good news that the kingdom of God is near. They have watched him heal sick people and free others from demons. In Sunday's gospel Jesus sends them out two by two with authority to heal and cast out demons as he does.

The simple but demanding ethical standards Jesus gives his disciples challenge them to become one with the people to whom they go. The way they must follow is one of healing and setting people free, not of material gain or self protection. They must depend for food and shelter on the people who welcome them.

Jesus anticipates that his disciples will meet rejection as he did in Nazareth. He admonishes these first

missionaries to shake the dust from their feet in places where people refuse to welcome them or hear their message.

The hearers of Mark's gospel in AD 70 know that Peter, James, John, and others among the twelve not only went on this short mission, but after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, spread the good news around the Mediterranean world. This second generation of hearers knows that Jesus was put to death and raised up and that preaching Jesus' good news cost the apostles Peter, Andrew, and James their lives.

Mark's hearers have good reason to fear commitment. To follow Jesus' way is to give over one's life to the mission and its ultimate risks. Christian fled Jerusalem before its destruction at the hands of the Roman Tenth Legion. Like the disciples in Jesus' time,

Christians forty years later faced their own threats.

- Whose commitment as a disciple inspires you?
- The Jesuits hope that the experiences of young adults as mission volunteers "ruin them for life." What do you suppose this means?
- What is an experience that has ruined you for any other life than that of a disciple?

Why Jesus sends out apostles and why he sends out twelve are two different questions. In Greek the word *apostlein* means *to send*. An apostle is one sent on a mission, a missionary.

Only twice does Mark refer to any of Jesus' disciples as apostles: first, when Jesus appoints the twelve to preach his message and cast out demons in Mark 3.13-19; second, when Jesus sends the twelve out two by two to cast out demons, Sunday's gospel.

The twelve are not the only apostles who continue Jesus' work. Paul, for example, is an apostle but not one of the twelve. Paul journeys into Asia Minor with another apostle, Barnabas, on his first missionary trip. Paul identifies a couple, Andronicus and Junia, as "prominent among the apostles" in Rome (Romans 16.7).

Why does Jesus send out twelve? Jesus' intimate circle of followers includes many more than twelve. In fact, Mark tells us that many women followed and served Jesus throughout his ministry from its beginning in Galilee; they came with him to Jerusalem, and witnessed his death, burial, and resurrection (Mark 15.40-41).

Twelve has its significance as a symbol of the universality of Jesus' mission. The number twelve looks back in history



**Preach the gospel always.
Use words if necessary.**

—St. Francis of Assisi

to the number of the tribes of ancient Israel.

Sending out twelve apostles represents sending one missionary to every tribe. Jesus' mission is to all of Israel and ultimately to all the peoples of the world. In the book of Revelation the number twelve looks toward the future where the city of God has twelve gates, always open, for people to bring into it the glory of the nations (21.21,25-26).

● **How does Jesus' sending twelve men out as his apostles affect how you see women continuing Jesus' mission work today?**

As the twelve take up Jesus' mission, they perform three actions that cultivate Christian community. First, they preach. Their message is repentance—turning afresh toward God, opening one's heart to the Spirit's purposes for us. Our friendship with God colors every other relationship in which we live. It establishes us as equals and life-giving partners with all God's creatures rather than gods of our own self-centered worlds. It opens our eyes to the mystery of the holy in which we live.

Second, Jesus' disciples cast out demons. Today psychology helps us name the demons of the human spirit—destructive drives and addictions that keep us from possessing ourselves, that erode our capacity to love and keep faith. In Jesus' time these demons probably also included mental illnesses. Jesus' mission aims to free people to love and listen, to value one another, and care for one another in community.

DO SOMETHING

CHARITY

JUSTICE

- Visit a sick neighbor or friend this week.
- Befriend an elderly person whom you can help stay connected to the wider community.
- Listen and learn about what prescriptions and medical benefits matter most to sick and elderly folks.
- Give a gift of scented oil to someone for whom you are praying to help the person remember you care.

Third, the twelve anoint and heal the sick as Jesus did. Oil soothes and salves. In anointing and attending to the sick, Jesus' disciples in his time and we today keep people connected to the community, in its weave where people share their burdens, pain, and joy. Simple listening to their stories can help people in anxious economic situations. Listening can open up ways to help.

We continue Jesus' mission in our time just as the twelve do in Sunday's gospel. We can testify to God's presence in our lives. We can participate in helping friends and family members free their capacity to love from too much work or drink, or too little voice or purpose. We can attend the sick.

Mark's gospel opens with John the Baptist urging people to prepare the way of God's coming among them. John sounds like Second Isaiah, who called the Israelites in exile home to become a people again more than 500 years earlier.

Mark's gospel ends with the promise that the risen Jesus has gone ahead to Galilee, where his disciples will find him. In every generation disciples can find the way Jesus walked by living as Jesus lived and hanging out with sinners, sick people, and outcasts.

- **Who have you helped through listening?**
- **How have you helped people stay connected in hard times?**
- **How do you continue Jesus' mission?**



Prophets face rejection.

In the prophetic words that Amos speaks in the 700s BC, God roars, and pastures wither (1.2). The prophet angers the king and people by indicting them for indifference to the poor, exploiting the poor, taking bribes, and cheating people. The wealthy of Israel's court do not welcome his message.

Amos is a precursor to John the Baptist and Jesus, an earlier prophet whose preaching a king rejects. Amos does not belong to a professional school of prophets, which must have existed in his time.

God's call brings Amos no benefit. It changes his life, takes him from his work, and leads him into trouble. King Amaziah kicks Amos out of the royal sanctuary at Bethel and out of the northern kingdom.

The king rejects Amos.

And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Holy One took me from following the flock, and the Holy One said to

me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"

Amos 7.12-15

- **Why are prophets so unpopular with kings?**
- **How are we responding to the prophets among us?**

PRAY

Conclude your reflection together on the Sunday scriptures by praying together. Make a commitment to speak and act on your Christian faith this week.

LEADER: Jesus calls us beyond the barriers we erect among us and to take our turn in our time as his apostles.

Each who wishes makes a commitment.

ALL: (after each commitment) **Jesus, we will take our turn as your disciples.**



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