

July 5            We Need To Be Needed            Mark 6:1-13

While we have no gospel record of the phrase, in the book of Acts, Paul indicates that Jesus said *it is more blessed to give than to receive*.

As a perfect attendance kid in SS, I thought this was perhaps a misprint. In my vast childhood wisdom, it seemed to me that receiving was more of a blessing. Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed giving Christmas gifts to my mom and dad...not so much my brother. But the blessing of that just didn't stack up to the blessing of a new bike, a board game or a baseball glove.

Later, I learned that the phrase was meant to instruct me about the way I should feel about it, not the way I did feel about it. Preachers told me that if I gave more, I would be blessed more. So I put a dime in my offering envelope instead of a nickel. My allowance was 50 cents, so I was giving 20%. But I have to be honest, I didn't feel as blessed doing that as when my mom would splurge and buy me an icecream cone.

Later in life, I began to discover that blessedness is a state of contentment, satisfaction and wholeness, not the temporary happiness of getting something new. This blessedness comes to us when we give. *When we cast our bread upon the water, it returns to us*, the Bible says. But not the way we think.

Two preachers were discussing how they determined how much they should return to God. One said, *I have a circle on the floor of my office and I stand in the middle of it and toss the money in the air. Whatever lands in the circle is God's and whatever lands outside is mine.*

The other preacher said, *I do something like that. I throw all my money in the air and whatever God want, he keeps and whatever he sends back down is mine.*

**The bread of blessedness that returns to us does not come back from the place we give it like a return on investment.** When we cast our bread on the water, we don't stand around at the beach waiting for fresh loaves to wash back on the surf. That would make our giving a transaction.

True gifts are given with no expectation of return. When you take an emergency safety class, you may receive a certificate in return for your successful work. But that's not blessing. The blessing comes when a friend is injured and your trained treatment saves their life. The phrase *it is more blessed to give than to receive* is descriptive of this reality.

Which would you rather do, make a visit to someone in intensive care or receive a visit in intensive care? Would you rather give to our Christian Assistance fund to help someone who is unemployed or would you rather receive Christian Assistance funds because you're unemployed.

This is the nature of life. **If you are in a position to give, you are in a place of blessedness. When you are on the receiving end, blessing is hard to come by.**

And that brings us to our text today in **Mark 6**. Jesus sends out his disciples two by two to carry out his ministry of liberation and healing; to proclaim the kingdom of Christ. In **v. 8**, he gives our some strange instructions: *take nothing for your journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in your belt; wear sandals and just one tunic.*

Jesus was not a boy scout. Scouts are always prepared. When they take a trip, they take first aid kits, swiss army knives, a compass (actually a GPS device now), water, sleeping bags, tents, you name it. The only thing scoutish about the instruction of Jesus was the walking stick.

Why did Jesus want his disciples so unprepared? Why would Jesus want his disciples to lack the basic necessities of life? Did he want them to make cardboard signs and stand on the street corner? How were they supposed to eat? Where were they supposed to stay?

Jesus told them to stay with people who would extend hospitality to them; not at the King David Hotel; not at the Kibbutz 6. Apparently, Jesus wanted his disciples to be guests of those they came to heal and help. But why impose?

We don't do mission and ministry that way. Historically, when we go out, we carry all kinds of things with us.

First, we carry **knowledge and expertise**; the right answers to whatever questions might come our way. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Southern Baptists had the best trained missionaries in the world. We built mission compounds, hospitals, schools and seminaries all over the world, and generation after generation, we continued to send missionaries to control those institutions because we knew how to do it.

We designed farming systems and economic systems that reflected the best of our culture; systems that needed our continued oversight. After all, we had the know-how and indigenous people were not really capable. We would run the show indefinitely.

By contrast, the disciples of Jesus were sent out before they really understood who Jesus was. They weren't trained professionals. Nor did they go out to establish institutions that required their expertise. We have done missions as the experts. Jesus sent rookies.

The disciples were told to take nothing with them, but we aren't into that. Secondly, we **always carry money and goods** on mission. A missionary to the Gulf Coast after Katrina was overseeing a feeding station when he observed something telling. A woman who had been through the feeding line every day and was displaced from her house and staying with a relative, brought some cookies to those who were serving food as a thank you for their kindness. Her expression was met with "*o my, you shouldn't have done that; you've lost so much and we're here to give to you. Let us give these cookies to people who come through the line.*"

Our way of mission has always been about being the ones who have, called to give to the ones who have not. We have what we need. You're the one's who don't have what you need. We can't possibly accept from you. That's not the way it works. Jesus said, *don't take any money.*

But there's something else we take with us to do mission that Jesus would not let his disciples take with them. It's the invisible asset. We take **status and power**. Sometimes we sweep into areas by our own invitation. We determine what the needs are and how we will meet them. We might even advocate or apply political pressure. We have more power than most.

Of course the disciples also went with power. They brought priceless gifts to the poor and broken. They brought gifts of **healing, salvation and deliverance**. And their ministry was greeted as you would imagine. They were elevated to an unequalled status in those villages. Like Paul and Silas, and like Jesus, they were greeted as saviors. It's a heady wine.

So Jesus made sure they came down from that glorious mountain top experience. He would not let them **stay** in the position of power and glory. He made sure they could not care for themselves. Why would he insist that they not stay in a position of giving?

Some say it was to **protect the disciples from pride**. When we are the ones who give; when we are the ones with plenty; when we make the decisions about when, how, where and who, we get a big dose of pride. Yes, that good feeling we get is the glory of giving.

Jesus called us to **humble service** and as such, pride is as much the enemy as poverty. Givers become experts in what others need and when and how they need it. They come to think of themselves as being self-sufficient rather than dependent upon God and others.

Yes, Jesus sent out the 12 in ways that protected them from pride. But he also sent them out in this way so that those who received a blessing would have the opportunity to bless in return; so that those who received ministry could become ministers.

I don't remember his name, probably because my experience with him was such a painful disappointment, but he was an active member of the church I served in Waco and he was involved in a serious auto accident that left him disabled. When he came out of the hospital, his class had created a team to give him rides to church. We did not have an elevator down to our fellowship hall, so we repaired an old chair lift so he could get down there for fellowship meals. We took food to his house and helped him get adjusted in several other ways.

And after about two months of this, he began telling his rides that he didn't feel up to coming to church. He began declining other attempts we made to help. This was reported to me, so I went to visit him. I went thinking that we had failed to do something or worse, that some of our care givers were getting weary and he was picking up on that sentiment. So I was surprised when he said to me, *I won't be coming to church anymore, so you can tell everyone thanks but they won't be needed anymore.*

*Have we done something to offend you, I asked in disbelief? Actually, quite the opposite, he said. The church has done for me more than I could have asked. Then what's wrong? I know it sounds strange, he said, but all of this help makes me feel so useless. The more you guys give to me the worse I feel.*

It was the first time I saw charity backfire, but it wasn't the last. I've seen it the eyes of those who receive Christmas packages. It's a look that says I need your gift and I hate your gift at the same time. It's not very blessed to always be in need.

As we gather information about helping organizations in our community that we might work with as SS classes, one of the characteristics we need to look for is **reciprocity**. It needs to be giving and receiving so that those we serve are neighbors and not objects of our charity. The best ministry we can be part of is focused on the assets and capacities of those we serve, not their problems and scarcities. And we can't just give to them. We must also need them.

There was a kid who participated in our neighborhood program in Waco who was really troubled, really angry, really disruptive. And not understanding the chemistry of need, we could not understand why he wasn't the grateful recipient of our kindness, our teaching, our recreation and our food. We didn't realize we were magnifying his deficiencies.

One day, he was out on the porch where he had been exiled for misbehaving, and he was playing with a hacky sack...a little bean bag ball that you kick around with your feet. I had seen it done but I hadn't tried it, so I asked him if he would teach me how to do it. His demeanor did a 180. It was the most amazing, instantaneous turnaround that I ever witnessed. He went from being defiant and obnoxious to playing the part of the caring coach. And the more he got into teaching me, the more I needed his help. I didn't stage it, but I sure learned from it.

**Tis more blessed to receive when others have a great need to give.** When you go out this week, pack lighter; a blessing awaits.