JESUS TRAINS HIS DISCIPLES

Mark 6:6b-29
Key Verse 6:7

“Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.”

Welcome back to WIU, and may God bless and strengthen you in your studies and in your service to the Lord in this new semester!

Last semester, we finished our study of Mark’s gospel with the story of how Jesus’ hometown people rejected Jesus, so that he could perform only a few miraculous signs, and heal only a few sick people. In the end, Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. As the gospel of Mark emphasizes, faith in God and faith in Jesus as the Son of God is the most important thing. For those who have faith, everything is possible. For those who have faith, there is forgiveness, healing and new life. But for those who don’t have faith, there is a tragic and vicious circle of life. What is more, there is no excuse, because not having faith is not an accident – it’s a choice. That is why Jesus was amazed at his hometown peoples’ lack of faith. They had the choice to believe, and experience the healing touch of the Messiah. But in their pride and self-righteousness, they chose to reject Jesus, saying, “who does he think he is?” None of us is from Jesus’ hometown. Still, there is a familiarity with Jesus’ name in this nation that breeds a similar contempt. Many young people are resentful at all the demands and restrictions put on them in Jesus’ name. So we must ask ourselves, have we learned from Jesus the secret of faith that brings healing? Or do we amaze Jesus with our lack of faith?

In today’s passage, we read about two events. The first is the evangelistic journey of the disciples. The second is the beheading of John the Baptist. Jesus’ ministry was growing in power and in influence. Jesus’ name was becoming well known. But Jesus’ growing popularity could not change the fact that this world is under the power of sin and Satan. Such a world cannot long stand to bear the presence of holy and righteous men, like John. This reality makes us fearful and
eventually, very selfish. But Jesus did not give in to the pessimism of unbelief. By faith in God’s promises, Jesus continued to raise his disciples as spiritual generals for the sake of fighting the spiritual battle to set his people free from slavery to sin. May God bless us to learn Jesus’ faith in fighting against the power of sin, and may God teach us how to grow as his coworkers in planting faith in his word in others!

I. The evangelistic journey (6b-13)

Look at verse 6b. “Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.” Jesus was amazed at his hometown peoples’ lack of faith (6a). But Jesus was not discouraged or angry. Jesus took his message of the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation and began teaching in one village after another. Jesus did not combat lack of faith with miraculous signs. Jesus combated lack of faith with the message of the word of God. Jesus devoted himself to driving out the unbelief and fear that held his people captive by planting faith in the word of God in their hearts. The truth is that the Jews of Jesus’ time were a very religious people. But the truth is also clear that this was an unbelieving generation. They knew God’s promises well, but they did not believe them. This is why Jesus’ message was so new and different. He wasn’t just proclaiming the promise of God; he was proclaiming its fulfillment through his life and through all who would believe in him. He was proclaiming, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news. Sons and daughters, your sins are forgiven.” (Mk. 1:15, 2:5). When the people came and heard Jesus’ message, it was like a bright light shining into their hearts. A bright new day was coming and had come, when God’s word of promise would be fulfilled in their presence. (Jn. 4:24).

Look at verse 7. “Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.” Jesus was engaged in a great battle against the spirit of unbelief in his generation. But Jesus did not treat this as a one man show. He encouraged his disciples to participate with him in this spiritual battle. He called them and sent them out into the Galilean countryside as messengers of his gospel and as living proof of the power of faith. Jesus does not call disciples
so that they might sit down and do nothing. Jesus calls them and trains them so that they can work together with him in order to change the unbelieving generation into a generation of faith and God’s healing and victory. Jesus sent them out two by two. As individuals, the disciples were men of weakness and failing. But when these weak men humbled themselves and worked together in order to serve their Master Jesus and their God, they discovered that each one covered the other’s weaknesses. What is more, they experienced God’s presence through their coworking and love for one another for the sake of God’s world salvation purpose. It is God’s wisdom that Jesus’ disciples should work together. The apostle John was known as a violent and vengeful man. So Jesus called him and his brother James, Boanerges, which means “Sons of Thunder.” Later, however, John learned the spiritual meaning of fellowship and coworking. He wrote in 1 John 4:12, “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

Jesus also gave his disciples authority over evil spirits. The truth is that the disciples were still mere spiritual infants. They hardly knew the spiritual world, and they easily fell into doubt, fear or were beset by their sinful desires. They could do nothing by themselves except catch fish, get into arguments with one another and follow their sinful desires. However, these men were not useless, as we might think. Their greatness was that they had faith in Jesus’ word. They had come under the authority of Jesus’ word, and Jesus’ word had begun to transform them from men of desires and feelings into men of truth. Of course, they had submitted themselves to Jesus because of their desires for personal blessing. But once they came under his authority, they found that they also had authority because of Jesus’ name. When they obeyed Jesus’ commands to do something, they discovered they had the power and authority to do it. We can experience the same thing in our own lives. Jesus commanded us as his disciples, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” When we obey this command and trust in Jesus’ authority as the Christ, we can raise disciples of Jesus, and we can help sinners like us to obey Jesus and come under his authority as well. At this point, Jesus did not direct his disciples to raise other
disciples. He gave them authority over evil spirits. The work of evil spirits is to suppress the truth of God and to plant fear and doubt in the hearts of men. The work of evil spirits is really terrible. We must know that living in this world of sin, all men are being probed, prodded and influenced by evil spirits, just as our bodies and even our computers are being infiltrated by viruses and bugs. Jesus gave his disciples authority to drive out evil spirits and to set people free from their influence. Jesus gave his disciples spiritual authority to defeat the power of the devil, fear and doubt, with the message of repentance and gospel faith.

Verses 8-11 are Jesus' instructions to his disciples for their evangelistic journey. Let's look at each one. “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.” (8b-9). With this command, we can see that Jesus was treating this journey as a training mission for his disciples. In general, Jesus and his disciples carried very little with them. All the same, they had money and supplies from those who prayed for them, such as the women mentioned in Luke 8:1-3. But on this short journey, Jesus presents his disciples with a challenge: take nothing except a staff and the clothes you wear. Through this command, Jesus was teaching his disciples that they had been called to begin a new life of faith in God, even as God had called the ancestor of faith, Abram. Like Abram, they needed to leave behind familiar and comfortable things, and learn how to depend on God for everything, moment by moment. Every Christian must learn the same faith, for it is by the faith of Abraham that we are saved and become God’s children. “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.” (10). Jesus commanded the disciples to build up a relationship with one family in each new town, and learn to cowork with them in serving their townspeople. The disciples might be shy about burdening others by their presence and needs. But they should overcome their shyness, and enlist others in helping them fight the spiritual battle against fear and unbelief. “And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.” (11). Jesus’ disciples must be clear about the importance and value of their mission in proclaiming the gospel. They should not compromise the gospel message, but always stand clearly on the side
of the gospel, and faithfully proclaim Jesus’ name. Those who reject the gospel must know that they will have no part in Jesus’ mercy, the gift of the Holy Spirit or the hope of eternal life.

Look at verses 12-13. “They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” The disciples went out with the authority Jesus gave them, and began to preach repentance and saving faith in Jesus’ name. Many people tormented by demons came, and they were set free when the disciples rebuked them in Jesus’ name. Many sick people crowded around them, but instead of being afraid, the disciples anointed them with oil and healed them, one by one, in Jesus’ name. Gradually, the disciples’ spiritual eyes were opened. They experienced the power of God that only comes when we submit to his word of truth, and trust that his promises will be fulfilled. And the whole region of Galilee began to ring with Jesus’ name. Here we learn that the work of God does not depend on favorable circumstances or fully mature servants of God. The work of God depends on faith in Jesus’ name. By faith in Jesus and in obedience to Jesus’ commands, we can do God’s work and we can defeat the work of the devil in others, one by one. May God bless us with the faith of the disciples to drive out many demons of lust, fear and doubt from WIU students! May God help even twenty of them become men and women of spiritual authority and wonderful Bible teachers through faith in Jesus’ name!

II. A demon-possessed king

The disciples’ ministry caught the attention of king Herod, who ruled over Galilee. People had been talking about Jesus, not only because of the miracles he performed, but also because of the ministry of the disciples in Jesus’ name! It was as if the days of the Bible were coming alive right before their eyes! But they did not see it as the fulfillment of God’s promises made in the Bible. They imagined a fantastic scenario to explain what was going on. King Herod reacted differently to the news. Look at verse 16. “But when Herod heard this, he said, ‘John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead.’” The beautiful work of God made this one man tremble in fear. It is a terrible story why Herod reacted in this way. But Mark tells it, because
it highlights the nature of the spiritual battle Jesus’ disciples must fight, and also why we must fight it.

Herod’s story begins with his desire for power and prestige at the expense of his brother Philip. Herod was one of the many sons of Herod the Great, and established as a tetrarch over the region of Galilee after Herod the Great’s death. The brother Philip had married the daughter of another of Herod’s sons, Aristobulus, whose ancestry through his mother was of Jewish nobility. This girl was named Herodias. Herodias had a daughter, Salome, from this marriage. Both Herod and Herodias were later divorced, and then got married to each other for political reasons, he, to become more legitimately Jewish, she, to gain social standing. Herodias was both Herod’s niece and sister-in-law of a living brother. This marriage was judged as unlawful by the people, and John the Baptist told him so directly. According to Mark, this greatly offended Herodias, and she prompted Herod to have John arrested. Herodias wanted John killed, but Herod was not willing, because he knew John was a holy and righteous man. In fact, Herod seems to be at a loss what to do with John. He liked to listen to him, but what John said puzzled him. Herod was a man enslaved by his sinful desires and his unbelief. He knew what was right, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. So he remained there, hesitating about where to go next. This is the exact picture of a man enslaved by his sinful desires. He might hope that things will work out for the best. But the truth is that he is destined to become the devil’s prey.

Look at verse 21. “Finally, the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.” Herod wanted to reward his faithful servants and show off his generosity and wealth on his birthday. His daughter-in-law danced so appealingly for the guests that everyone was entranced, and Herod was moved to make a foolish oath, promising her whatever she wanted, up to half his kingdom. The girl went to her mother, and her mother said, “Ask for the head of John the Baptist.” The girl was so bold in her demand that Herod was flabbergasted. At that moment, he had to repent and escape from the devil's trap. But he had no faith to repent. He held on to the empty honor of fulfilling human vows, and had John executed in prison, and
his head brought to the girl on a platter. John was a great man who had served as the forerunner of the Messiah. But his life was cut short because of lust, greed and selfishness. The story of Herod and Herodias and Salome seems outlandish and grotesque. But it is a story that captures the true essence of a world that is under the power of sin and unbelief. In such a world, the good things from God are despised and eventually, snuffed out.

But that is not the end of the story. Just as Herod feared that the news of Jesus' disciples' evangelistic journey promised God's judgment on him for his despicable act, so this sinful world that despises and rejects God's truth and God's love will come under judgment. God's good purpose and will for mankind and for this world is not snuffed out at all by the evilness of men and the traps set by the devil. Jesus as the Son of God has the authority to drive out the devil, the prince of this world. And Jesus calls us as his servants to proclaim faith in him and in his word, so that everyone who believes shall not perish, but have eternal life in the kingdom of God. Surely, we live in a world that is under the power of sin and death. But our master is no longer the power of sin and death. When we believe in the gospel and in Jesus as the Christ, then he becomes our master, and our hope is to live from now on as instruments of God's righteousness by the power of his name.

May God bless WIU to be set free from the power of sin and unbelief! May God bless us to do the work of God on this campus, when we come under the authority of Jesus' name! May God raise up 20 faithful 1 to 1 bible teachers from among WIU students in this year!