

“What Are You Waiting For?”

Mark 1:14-20; 2:13-17; 3:13-19; 6:6b-13

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This morning we are going to commission our members that will be going to Tijuana, New York City and Appalachia on mission trips. We want them to know of our appreciation for their willingness to go and our prayer support as they minister in Christ's name. When they return, we look forward to hearing about the work that God accomplished through them.

As we prepare to commission these volunteers, let us turn our attention to the calling and commissioning of Jesus' disciples. Mark will be our narrator.

The text today reveals an overarching theme of Jesus' ministry. He did not want to work alone to accomplish his goals. He called others to help him. Hardly anyone would find this unusual, but the people he selected to help him had to raise a lot of eyebrows. As a matter of fact, it still does.

Whom did he call? Did he contact the Temple placement office or the Jerusalem branch of Headhunters to secure the most qualified, educated, equipped, prepared and noted people of his day to be his disciples? Surely he consulted the religious leaders and picked the finest from their ranks. Well, not exactly, and this was no doubt the topic of several conversations. He chose no disciple from the religious field, but ordinary people that had no training to do what he would challenge them to do. There was not a priest or scribe among them, only fishermen, a tax collector and common laborers.

Why did he do this? With so much at stake, why did he take such a risk? He wanted to send a message to the religious leaders and common folk. What was that? Ministry is for everyone. Everybody can be a World Changer. Ordinary people partnering with God and others can usher in the Kingdom of God and make the world better.

What better way could he send this message than by choosing twelve gifted but ordinary disciples? Sure it was a gamble and a revolutionary idea, but it worked, and aren't you glad it did? His method of doing ministry has opened unimaginable doors of meaningful service for all of us. This, in turn, has led to an indescribable level of purpose and joy in the lives of all that have responded to his invitation.

William Willimon helped me to see Jesus' call of his disciples in a new light. He states that Jesus called disciples to help him in his work because he enjoyed ministry so much he wanted them to try it. When Jesus commissioned the disciples and sent them out two-by-two, he gave them the authority to do everything he was doing, including healing the sick. He wanted them to experience the thrill and joy that accompanies helping others.

I don't know that I had thought of his call to the disciples for this reason, but I certainly like it. I've always connected the disciples' call to the overwhelming needs of mankind, and there is merit in this logic. However, Willimon has exposed the heart of Jesus and I like what I see. Just as God shared the creative act with man by allowing him to name the animals and tend the garden, so Jesus shared the restoration of creation with any that would respond.

This includes us. Jesus is still calling disciples to be World Changers. **How are you going to respond?** I encourage you to do three things.

First of all, say yes to his call and thank him for having confidence in you. Don't delay this decision any longer. Take to heart the words of Anne Frank, "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

Secondly, ask God to help you turn your talents into spiritual gifts. I am indebted to Doris Nelms, Reverend Kathy Dobbins and Dr. Colin Harris for helping me understand the relationship between talents and gifts through their book, Klesis. A spiritual gift is a talent that is used to build up the family of faith and make the world better. The difference between a talent

and spiritual gift is how it is used. Ministry occurs anytime we become the presence of Christ in someone's life by using our talents to help him or her. While a talent says, "Look at me and what I can do," a spiritual gift says, "Look at God and what He is doing through me."

Athletes have talents that can be used to make them lots of money. When that talent is used to make money for foundations that help meet the critical needs of people, it becomes a spiritual gift. Take Brian McCann as an example.

This young man from Duluth has developed into one of the Braves and baseball's best players. It was announced last Monday that he has been selected to play in the All-Star game on July 11. Few players accomplish this their first full year in the majors. Without a doubt, Brian is very talented on the field.

He is also using that talent to help our own Claire and Bill Smith promote the foundation they established after their son's death to leukemia. "When Everyone Survives" is the foundation in memory of Wes Smith that Claire and Bill are using to fund research that will one day overcome this dreaded disease, and Brian is helping them do it. His talents are being transformed into spiritual gifts through his work in this ministry.

While none of us is a professional baseball player, all of us have skills and talents that can become spiritual gifts when we use them to continue the good work of our Lord. The opportunities are limited only by our imagination.

Cooking becomes a spiritual gift when a dish is taken to someone that is sick. Carpentry skills become spiritual gifts when they are used to build a Habitat for Humanity house. Teaching becomes a spiritual gift when a teacher helps students learn how to be responsible citizens. Driving becomes a spiritual gift when an elderly person is transported to the doctor. Hospitality becomes a spiritual gift when a stranger is welcomed into a group or community.

I'm sure you understand how this works now and see how inclusive Jesus' method of doing ministry is. It is a brilliant idea that is most effective, efficient and rewarding.

Thirdly, respond to Jesus' call by asking God to help you be faithful when distracted by the lure of the world or when ministry gets tough. What did Jesus instruct his disciples to take with them when they went out to minister in his name? Very little; as a matter of fact, he told them to pack only the bare necessities, their staff, a single tunic and sandals, the shoes of common, humble folk.

Jesus' invitation to his disciples was a call for simplicity and as Walter Brueggemann declares, "reckless faith." Why? I think it goes beyond identification with their Jewish ancestors that left Egypt with few possessions and a lot of dreams. It was a way of keeping the disciples focused upon their mission, not their personal comfort. If they were going to be serious about helping others, they were going to have to be as unattached to the things of this world as Jesus was and as unencumbered as he so they could respond without hesitation when others needed them. Like all people, they would face strong temptations to use their talents solely for the purpose of pursuing their own goals and dreams. Only with God's help could they remain faithful to their commitment of turning talents into spiritual gifts to be used to advance God's cause, not merely their own.

Jesus knew his disciples would also need God's help to be faithful in the midst of adversity. Not everyone would appreciate them or respond to their message of hope, just as they did not respond positively to Jesus. In these difficult times, they would need God's help to persevere. So will we when our efforts are shunned and our message is rejected.

God understands and will give us the strength, determination, fortitude, vision, patience and grace to be a faithful disciple. After all, he doesn't want us to miss the thrill and joy that accompany helping others in his name.

So, what are you waiting for? How and where can you turn your talents into spiritual gifts? I have a feeling God will show you how you can do this in the coming week. I encourage you to seize the opportunity.