

Who is this, that sends us out?

Maple Grove UMC

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Mark 6:1-13

Rev. Dr. Brenda Buckwell – Living Streams Flowing Water

I have spent some extended time recently with my children and grandchildren. When I am with them my mind can easily go to stories like Thomas the Train, The Little Engine that Could or perhaps more challenging stories of the ugly duckling, beauty and the beast, The Princess and the Frog.

These more challenging stories, the ugly duckling, beauty and the beast, The Princess and the Frog; are invitations to look beyond the surface. Things are not simply as they appear. A cursory, surface, or presumptive glance could lead the viewer to miss out on the fullness of beauty and love of the stories.

Or if we look toward real life: Simone Biles from the Olympics. When the news broke that she would not be completing and had pulled out, the haters tweeted, ... But when the real story came out, we learned a lot about the twisties and mental health. She was courageous! Not an ugly duckling but a true beauty.

It is so easy to have a presumptive perspective when seeing things, people, and events. Do you know, according to psychological works it takes us 6 seconds to make our minds up about strangers? Do we like what they wear? Is their voice soothing? We size them up unconsciously if they are someone we would like to know or not.

When have you, when have I looked upon another and stayed with your first glance of perspective and not delved deeper into the true person?

This morning we hear of some hometown children, now grown into adults who are still perceiving the other from their childhood pettiness. In our Gospel reading from Mark, we hear how Jesus is being judged by historic perceptions. They are not questioning his teachings or miracles. They are questioning who he thinks he is after going off on tour and coming back appearing to be at it were for his britches. There is not even enough respect to say he is his father's son but chide him saying he is a Mama's boy; he is Mary's boy.

The folks in Nazareth are viewing Jesus with historic, earthly, or surface eyes; only identifying him through the eyes of private jealousy or prejudgment.

- They do not believe that God can work so dramatically (healing, raising the dead, feeding thousands of people) in/ through someone they knew OR *better stated someone they think they knew*.
- They are demanding to know, “How can one so familiar to us be God’s anointed?”
- They are not driven to discover how Jesus did miraculous things that only God can do.
- Blindness to the truth takes many forms.

AND THIS BLINDNESS, when we trap others in our own expectations, about how the other should behave, what the other can and cannot do or be keeps the other from being his or her most authentic, God-gifted truest self.

The Gospel of Mark is all about helping the reading discover the true identity of Jesus. The readers encounter questions very quickly 1:27, 2:17, 4:41 and now here in chapter 6

- ✓ “Who is this?”
- ✓ “What is this?”
- ✓ “From where does this power come?”
- ✓ And for today – “Who is this, that sends us out?”

Mark is not so interested as to what the disciples did when Jesus sent them out, but the *necessary character needed by and formed in the disciples* that are sent out to mission by Jesus.

Jesus invested the disciples with his authority and a list of instructions:

- ✚ Travel light, do not pack anything.
- ✚ Do take a staff, an identifier that you are one of Jesus’ shepherds and wear sandals so that you can easily shake the dust from your feet when people will not receive you.
 - Expect to be rejected – just like Jesus was being rejected in Nazareth.
- ✚ Do not take provisions – no fund-raising project, no beggar’s bag, no food, no change of clothes.

It is not just about the church mission, but our individual lives.

Student from my Introduction to Spiritual Formation Class. His story is shared here with his permission. (See attached)

He was offering God’s presence of grace, compassion and truly seeing her as God sees her.

*Disciples are to go to on mission to neighbors near and around the world. **Totally dependent upon God’s provisions, which is to be provided by the generosity of others.***

Mark has Jesus preparing the disciples for mission after his death and resurrection.

- ✚ They are to accept the first thing offer to them – not move on in hopes of something better --- better accommodations, food, company
- ✚ They are to expect mass rejection as they have just witnessed in Nazareth or acceptance as they have marveled at throughout Jesus’ ministry.

Jesus is assisting the disciples in their own understanding of who Jesus is and was.

- ✚ They, we are not sent out on vacation but go in the power of Jesus’ name.
- ✚ They and we are not to offer something to the people that we believe in from our early childhood, just for others to believe in. It is not just the stories about Jesus.
- ✚ **But disciples are to share the presence of the living breathing energizing God that changes lives.**

And to share the power and presence of the living breathing, energizing, life transfiguring power of God with others we first must experience personally and collectively who Jesus is among humanity and his Divine essence in the community of the Trinity.

The truth of humanity is that we still are influenced by the words, standards, roles, of the world.

Parents often struggle to experience their grown children is they are truly gifted to be. And the reverse is often true – adult children often struggle to break their childhood imagine of who the parent is.

Assumptions are often made about:

- People who are now wearing masks since the state order has been lifted requiring masks.
- About language
- Dress,
- Gender

The invitation of Today’s Scripture reading is to discover two things:

1. An answer to the question “With what lens do you view Jesus?” “Through what lens do you view others?”
 - a. Historic?
 - b. Relational?
 - c. Logical?
 - d. From childhood perspective?
 - e. We are invited, no challenged to constantly mature to adult faith and action in love of God.

2. And truly “Who is this One, that sends us out to share the energizing power and presence of God with others?”

Mark is inviting us to trust Jesus’ truest identity, not from our learned Bible stories of our youth, but of our adult formational experiences of how God’s love.

What is a formational experience of God’s love?

The power and presence of God that literally transforms our inner character, mannerisms, motivations, and attributes of our heart more and more into Christlikeness, (gift of the spirit) so that we view life – others, self, God through the lens of Jesus’ transfiguration, life-changing, presence and love born upon the cross.

The definition of Spiritual Formation that I teach in all my classes and use with my clients is from the late Robert Mulholland, Jr. His book *Shaped by the Word*. Upper Room books. Page 25.

“Christian Spiritual Formation is the process of being more nearly conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.” The student’s story encompasses both clauses of this definition. From his fasting he clearly heard God – “Stop at Bob Evans. Eat now.” And as he gave think for his heart to think – I love the way he said that! He lived the second clause of the definition – “For the sake of others” as he conversed with the waitress.

Our faith, beliefs, theology is to be lived in everyday encounters with others, self, and God.

No longer may we view the Ugly Duckling from a surface presentation but seek to gaze beyond the surfaced to see the beauty of Christ indwelling presence in the other.

May it be so as we walk humbly, seek justice, and share God’s mercy and love with others.