

Jesus sends us with the essential...

Some of you know that one of the hobbies I enjoy is backpacking. I love hiking in mountains, taking in the beauty of God’s creation, for days at a time. And there’s one thing that’s essential to a good back-packing trip: Pack smart. See, if you overpack, you’ll end up lugging all sorts of unnecessary weight over miles of mountain terrain. That’s not fun. But if you under-pack - don’t bring enough food or layers of clothes for the cold mountain nights – well, that’s not fun, either. So you learn to pack the bare essentials – nothing more, nothing less.

In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is sending his disciples out on a trip. Not a back-packing trip; a much more important mission trip through the villages of Galilee. But listen to the packing instructions he gives them: **Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.** Does that sound like a smart packing plan to you? Sure, they weren’t heading into the middle of nowhere...but still. It seems like Jesus is sending them without even the bare essentials! No food – how would they eat? No money to rent a room to sleep in? No extra tunic to keep them warm outside at night?

But the closer we study these verses, we see that the opposite is true: Jesus is sending them with everything that they need for their mission trip. And it’s good for us to spend a few minutes studying these verses this morning. Because even though Jesus didn’t send us on this particular mission trip, he’s sent all of us with a Great Commission. And he provides all we need to carry it out. Jesus sends us with the essential... 1) His command 2) His promise 3) His message.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

⁸ These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹ 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.”

¹² They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

I. His command

You see Jesus’ love for souls here. His longing for sinners’ salvation. He’s just been rejected by his hometown of Nazareth. But that won’t stop him from preaching. He doesn’t wait for people to come to him. He goes to them – from village to tiny village in Galilee.

But time is short. Jesus only has a year before he’ll die for our sins, rise again, and ascend into heaven. And so many still don’t know him as Savior. And since in his state of humiliation Jesus is only in one place at one time, he decides to multiply the messengers. **Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out, two by two...** In saving love for souls, Jesus says to his disciples, “Go.”

But hasn’t he given us the same command? Sure, the ascended Jesus is no longer only in one place at one time. He’s in all places, at all times. And with all authority belonging to him, he’s very capable of bringing the message about him to the world all by himself! Instead, what did he say? “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make

disciples...” He could do it himself, but he’s chosen to give this high privilege to believers. You. Me. He’s **called us to him** by calling us to faith in him, washing our sins away, filling us with his love and his Spirit. And now he says, “Go!”

The time is short, because he’s coming back soon. And so many don’t know the error of their sins or the Jesus who saves them from them. So in saving love, he says, “Go.” He says it to our church as he points to the people in the community around us: “Go!” He says it to you, dear Christian, as he points to friends and coworkers and family who need to hear about him: “Go!” He may not send you with **authority to drive out evil spirits**, but the one with all authority has authorized you to bring the message about him to others. He sends you with the essential – his command.

II. His promise

But it seems, at first, that’s *all* he sent these 12 disciples with. That and a staff and sandals. **“Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.”**

Put yourself there with those disciples. What kind of questions come to mind as you hear Jesus say that? “But, Jesus...if I don’t take food, who’s gonna make sure I have something to eat? With no money, we can’t rent a room...who’s gonna make sure we have a place to stay? With no extra tunic, what happens if this one wears out or gets stolen? Who’s gonna make sure I’m clothed?”

And slowly the answer dawns on them: “God will.” Jesus wasn’t just sending them with staff and sandals...he was sending them with a promise: The promise that God would make sure their needs were provided for. Usually, he’d do that through the kindness and generosity of those who believed their message and would invite them to stay in their homes: **Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.** Jesus didn’t want a pursuit of their earthly needs, a desire to find the most comfortable accommodations, to distract them from their mission. So he frees them from those concerns with the promise God would take care of them, so they could keep their focus on growing Christ’s kingdom.

I know, your situation is a little different. You’re not called to full time preaching like they were. A pursuit of your earthly needs – making sure the bills are paid, and that you and your loved ones are fed and kept warm and have a roof over your heads – is a necessary aspect of your life.

But Jesus doesn’t want that pursuit to distract us from our mission, either. It happens, doesn’t it? That as a church, we can become so concerned about meeting the budget that we lose sight of the reason we have a budget, the mission God’s given us – to know Jesus and share Jesus. As individuals, too: The pursuit of making sure our earthly needs are met can distract us from the eternally important mission of growing Christ’s kingdom. Working to pay the bills leaves little time spent in God’s Word. Consumed by making sure our kids’ physical needs are met that we aren’t sharing God’s Word with them in the home. Making sure we have the latest creature comforts now, or a pursuit of living comfortably in retirement, leads to little offerings for growing Christ’s kingdom in the world.

Thank God we have a Savior who was never distracted. Who never let anything take priority over the eternally important mission God gave him: The mission of saving you. Who loved you so much that he was willing to give up the comforts of heaven and become a man for you.

Who loved you so much that he chose a life of poverty – but lived it perfectly, in your place, to make you rich with his righteousness. Who loved you so much that he suffered and died on the cross to pay for our messed up priorities and distracted living and all of our other sins. Who by his life and his death perfectly provided us with everything we need spiritually: Full and free forgiveness. An inheritance that can never spoil or fade – eternal life in heaven.

Like those disciples, he sends us with the essential - a promise. That the one who provided so perfectly for our spiritual needs will perfectly provide for our earthly needs, too. He points you to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field – how well God feeds and clothes his pets and his plants – and he says, “Will God ever fail to do the same for you, his dearly loved child?” He sets us free from a pursuit of earthly things, and he does it for the same reason: So we can keep Christ’s kingdom - knowing Jesus better and sharing Jesus with others - as our #1 priority. So that as a congregation, as individuals, with our offerings, we can, “seek first his kingdom” - trusting the promise that “all these things will be given to you as well.”

III. His message

But the most essential thing Jesus sent the disciples with was his message. Mark says, ¹² **They went out and preached that people should repent.** ¹³ **They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.** Sure, Jesus also gave them the power to do some miracles. To drive out demons. To heal people’s diseases and disabilities. And maybe we wish Jesus would send us out with the same!

But those miracles, they were secondary. They could save people’s bodies, but not their souls. They could free people from demon-possession, but not from sin and hell. They were just meant to draw people’s attention to the message Jesus sent them with. The message had God’s power to heal sin-sick souls and save from sin and hell.

Mark summarizes that message in one word: **Repent.** It’s a message that showed the people their sins, and called them to turn from them. A message that shared with the people what Jesus, their Savior, would do for them, and called them to trust in him. A message of sin and grace that worked faith in people’s hearts and washed away sin, took away guilt, saved from death and hell.

Jesus warns the disciples that it’s a message that won’t be popular. That there would be places that **would not welcome** them or **listen to it.** But when that happened, they weren’t to change it, make it more appealing, water it down. God’s power is in that message, and no other. Preach it one more time as they shook the dust off their feet on their way out of town.

It’s still an unpopular message. People don’t want to hear about sin, or that they are so lost need a Savior. The temptation is, as a church, to avoid the topic. Preach feel good, self-help style sermons instead! The temptation as individuals is to avoid topic. Think when pastor talks about sinners, he’s talking about the rest, and not me! But God’s power to save is in that message, and no other.

You know that because you’ve experienced it. It’s the message God used to save you. Whether with water in baptism, or in the mouth of someone sent by Jesus later in life, he brought you to faith by it. Saved you from sin and hell and gave you forgiveness and heaven by bringing you to faith in Jesus. Removed your guilt and gave you peace. Healed your sin-sick soul.

And now he's placed this message in our hands to bring to others. Let's keep it as THE essential – both in our church and our hearts. And then, at his command, and with his promises in our hearts, let's bring it to the world. Amen.