

Mark 6:1-13^{vii} ^{viii}

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

^{vii} **About the Gospel: Mark 6:1-13**

The account of Jesus' rejection by his relatives and townspeople comes near the end of the Galilean ministry, and signals an extension of his kingdom ministry beyond the narrow confines of Galilee. The story echoes the Markan pattern found earlier in Capernaum where Jesus' teaching first evokes astonishment (1:22) and ends on a note of hostility (3:6) because he does not conform to their limited stereotypes of who he is and what he can and ought to

be. This pattern will later appear in Jerusalem and his rejection there will end in his death (chaps. 12-14).

Verse 4 expresses a common idea in the literature of the time and occurs in several non-biblical writings. Mark has not yet explicitly identified Jesus as a prophet, but it certainly would have been a popular way to identify him and his teaching, as it was of John the Baptist (6:15, 8:27-28). The hometown people's narrow view of Jesus and inability to see him in this prophetic role cuts them off from the new way of salvation that Jesus offers. Mighty deeds, which serve as pointers revealing the power with which this new way changes lives, are irrelevant when faith is absent.

For the early Church this story helped explain the mystery of Jesus' rejection by his people, the Jews, and his acceptance by the Gentiles. The refusal to recognize the Messiah because he did not conform to their narrowly constructed stereotypes blinds them to the awareness that God is doing something new here in the person and ministry of Jesus.

The commissioning and instruction of the Twelve is paralleled by Matthew (Matthew 10:1, 9-14) and Luke (Luke 9:1-5). But each account is adapted in a way reflecting each evangelist's particular emphasis. Mark uses the account of the commission of the Twelve to bracket the story of John the Baptist's death. The disciples, so often negatively portrayed by Mark, here are shown as participating in Jesus' own mission as set forth in 1:14-15, 32-39. The warnings about what should be taken indicate the urgency and sacred nature of their work. Jesus "began to send them out" (Greek, *apostellein*) as heralds, in word and deed, of the coming kingdom. In Mark, instead of taking nothing, the disciples are allowed staff and sandals. Perhaps he has modified the list for the more arduous non-Palestinian terrain familiar to his audience.

Verses 10-11 reflect the importance of hospitality in the mission of the early Church, for which Jesus' words set the standard. Pious Jews, when returning to the Holy Land, shook off alien dust before entering, lest they defile the land. Thus the 'shaking off of dust' symbolically marks a place as heathen, not part of the true Israel. It is acted out, not as a curse against, but as a solemn warning for, those who reject the disciples. The "apostles" report on their mission in 6:30. As Jesus' rejection in Nazareth (6:1-6) foreshadows the final repudiation in Jerusalem, so the sending forth of the disciples points toward the later mission of the Church.

viii **Reflection and Response**

The message in today's scripture readings is that God works through the flesh, all human frailty and weakness notwithstanding. Ours is an incarnational faith, and if we could but grasp the dynamic implications of this reality, each professing Christian could become a powerhouse of God's activity in the world.

The prophets who became spokespersons for God all felt inadequate to the call and protested their incompetence before God. In one way or another, God stood them on their feet. Ezekiel said, "The spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet." Paul's very weakness served the purpose of allowing the Holy Spirit to be the power that made him God's messenger.

Jesus, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwelt, emptied himself to become fully human. As faithful people of God, we have also found that as we empty ourselves, the Holy Spirit fills us and dwells in us. Our lives become channels of God's grace and power. However, self-emptying is neither a popular nor a well-understood idea. The buzzwords of our time are self-fulfillment and self-attainment, and self-seeking impulses often dominate our activities. Few realize that the spiritual world also abhors a vacuum, and that God, bidden to do so, will fill any offered space with the heavenly grace, life and power to work miracles of redemption in our lives.

Even so, we are not to expect all to understand or to be receptive to our incarnational experience. Jesus fared no better than the prophets before him. Their descendants jeered and suspected him. Satan is always present, throwing up barriers to faith. Even in the wilderness, Satan tempted Jesus to doubt his calling: "If you are the Son of God..."

Likewise, the devil sabotages faith in Nazareth. Jesus came to his own home and his own people said, "Who does he think he is?" God's enemy pulls the same trick on us when we are about to dare something for the Lord. Satan whispers in our ears, "Who do you think you are?" After all, people know where we come from too, and our credentials are not all that great. So our adventure for the Lord is too often aborted by our lack of trust in God's sufficiency.

The Nazarene villagers knew Jesus as a working man, a carpenter, and gave no credence to his authority on religious matters. We, on the other hand, are inclined to regard him as a religious teacher, doubting his relevance to the modern world of business, politics and international affairs. When we hesitate to apply his teachings to practical issues, we forfeit the experience of his sufficiency to work wonders through us.