

June 4, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
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COME AWAY BY YOURSELVES Mark 6:1-32

This week I read an article about a college baseball team that won their conference championship and is on the way to the NAIA college world's series (which cannot actually be a world's series anymore than the NCAA college world's series, or the MLB world's series involves all the teams in the world). Nevertheless, multiple players on this particular college team experienced injuries during the season. In an interview, the players said that, while it was difficult, they withdrew from the competition for as long as it took in order to heal so they would be healthy for the playoffs. Their withdrawal worked. No doubt it took incredible patience to stay off the field of competition. But by focusing on the larger picture—the long haul—the injured players were in good physical condition to compete for the conference championship and move on to the big series.

In a way, that is a picture of the Christian life. It seems like most Christians charge through life as though they are invincible or as though they are taking a walk through a pleasant rose garden not fearing so much as a mosquito bite. That is not an accurate view of the Christian life. Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* is one of the most accurate allegories ever sketched by the human pen. Bunyan accurately pictured the many pitfalls, dangers, and conflicts we face on the road to heaven. He clearly revealed in that story the reality that we will grow weary, we will get discouraged, and we will be wounded.

Time dedicated to healing, recovery, and rest in the Lord is essential for the followers of Christ. Jesus taught the twelve followers this important truth. In our text, we read about the intense activity Jesus assigned to the disciples, which was much like His own work.

We also read about the intense resistance to the ministry Jesus assigned to the disciples and resistance to His own ministry. It is in the conflicts and resistance that we are often wearied and wounded.

We need to take time to recover. Indeed, if we are wise, we will take time out every day to meet with the Lord to be reinvigorated, strengthened, and prepared for the work and conflicts of the day. How long can we go without “coming apart” to be with Jesus before we just come apart? It is likely that too many Christians prove the answer to that question too often. Jesus challenges us to come away from the pressures and demands of life to spend some time with Him.

Ministry Can Be Challenging (vv.1-29).

Because the world is sunk in sin, people generally do not respond well to the Master. Jesus taught this lesson to the disciples when He and they left Capernaum for Nazareth. *He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him (v.1)*. That was a journey through the hills of about 20 miles southwest. Under normal conditions, it probably would have been a day and half or two days of travel. That would be like us driving to Kansas City or Denver. It was a long trip.

Along the way, Jesus had just healed the woman from hemorrhages and took a detour to Jairus' house where his daughter lay dead. When Jesus revealed that He would make her better, the mourners laughed at Him and mocked him. Be that as it may, Jesus raised the dead girl to life (5:21-43).

Jesus and the disciples arrived at His hometown of Nazareth only to have the citizens of his hometown reject Him (vv.2-6). That rejection was all the more amazing in light of the fact that the people were astonished at Jesus' authoritative teaching. *And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?” (v.2)*.

That was a common response to the same kind of teaching throughout His ministry. There is no question that God the Son taught astonishing truths because He taught what God the Father had given Him to teach. He often said something like, *For I have not spoken on*

my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak (John 12:49). Perfect teaching, pure teaching, authoritative teaching to be sure. But people questioned it rather than receiving it by faith. The people in Nazareth wondered where Jesus learned these things. “What kind of wisdom is this?” they wondered. They could not figure out how He could do the mighty works.

So what is new about those responses? People in our age ask the same kinds of things of us. For example, it is not uncommon to hear, “What makes you think your religion is the only right one?” or “How could a loving God allow Jesus to be killed?” or “How can a virgin have a baby?” or “How could Jesus have actually risen from the grave?” We still must embrace truth by faith. Faith embraces truth that is yet to be explained. Rejection of truth is the response when people demand that human wisdom be satisfied.

Jesus taught perfect, authoritative truth and verified His teaching by mighty works, and the people were offended with Jesus. That doesn't even make sense. They asked, *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 (v.3).* That response revealed pride, jealousy, and envy. Essentially the people wondered, “Who does this man who grew up in our town think He is?” As if to say, “How dare He do miracles that make the rest of us look powerless!” Or as offended people argue today, “Why do you think Jesus is more godly or important than Mohammed, or Krishna, or Morani.”

The principle problem was the same then as it is today. Jesus explained it. *And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household” (v.4).* The problem is that a prophet is a mere person gifted by God to communicate God's message. A true prophet did not pursue or earn the gift. But by simply having the gift, the prophet reveals that God made a choice of a particular person. People who are closest to the prophet and yet do not love or trust God are often in rebellion against God as they conclude that God wasn't fair to bless their friend or relative.

In a somewhat startling conclusion we read that Jesus marveled at people's unbelief. *And he could do no mighty work there, except*

that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching (vv.5-6). It is not that Jesus is suddenly surprised when people refuse to believe Him. Rather the surprising thing is the spiritual darkness that sin holds over people. This is why the most sensible, logical, irrefutable proof, argument or evidence, does not convince sinners to embrace Jesus. Until the Spirit of God reveals truth to sinners and rips away the scales of spiritual blindness, they will not be convinced.

Should the followers and servants of Master Jesus expect to be treated better, see people believe more readily, or have people standing in line to hear and embrace the gospel of hope that Jesus brought? Not likely. People who do not respond well to Jesus do not respond well to the Master's servants (vv.7-29).

Jesus warned His representatives that this would be the case when He commissioned them (vv.7-13). He sent out with authority the twelve men who hung with Him. *And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits (v.7).* To own the authority of Jesus (that is, to be an apostle, a sent one) is amazing. To be able to manifest that power over the spirit world is incomprehensible. But even though they possessed great power and authority, Jesus required His servants to be vulnerable on this particular trip.

He told them that they were not to provide any means of sustenance for themselves. *He charged 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 put on two tunics (vv.8-9).* How would the disciples respond to that? Not to worry! Apparently someone was going to take care of them. Maybe or maybe not. As soon as Jesus required a certain amount of vulnerability, Jesus promised that His servants would receive a mixed reception. Sometimes the people's reception of them and their message would be neutral, or sometimes good, and probably most of the time somewhere in between. *And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there” (v.10).* Does that profound statement make sense? How long were they supposed to stay in one place?

Sometimes the reception would be negative. *“And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave,*

shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them” (Mark 6:11).

Jesus sent the servants out with an authoritative message and power to back it up. *So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent (v.12).* But Jesus also provided them with power in order to validate the message of repentance they preached. *And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them (v.13).* That was a temporary project, maybe intended to prepare the disciples for future service. In the end, all of the apostles were rejected, their message was rejected, they were lied about, slandered, and eventually martyred. That would exclude Judas who bailed out in sin, and John who was exiled and probably died of old age.

Then there was that special servant John the Baptist. In light of Jesus’ works, Herod was hearing rumors that were unsettling. King Herod Antipas was afraid that John the Baptist, who he had murdered, had risen from the dead (vv.14,16). Who was Jesus if He was John risen? Like the general response to Jesus that the disciples described, lots of people had a lot of ideas about who He was. *But others said, “He is Elijah.” And others said, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old” (v.15).* Jesus unsettled a lot of people.

The king was unsettled because he had a guilty conscience. John had spoken the truth that Herod was wicked for stealing his brother’s wife (v.18). Herod responded by arresting God’s servant and putting him in prison (v.17). Herod’s partner in crime expressed her displeasure by holding a grudge. Herod realized that John was right and that he was wicked (v.20). Herodias didn’t care who was right and simply wanted John dead (v.19). Eventually opportunity for vengeance arose where Herodias got her way and John lost his head (vv.21-28).

Such is the plight of the Lord’s servants. We live in a scary world. For about four centuries we Christians in America have had an easy road while our brothers and sisters in other ages and other cultures have suffered greatly. It would appear now that the God-deniers are in charge of every aspect of our culture that we will soon face the reality Jesus warned about.

It is Good and Necessary to Talk to Jesus (vv.30-32).

In time, the servants Jesus had sent out returned and reported success. No doubt their report fit perfectly with what Jesus had promised. *The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught (v.30).* The good news is that they demonstrated the power Jesus had given. And many people believed! Not only that, but as in a later sending of 70 disciples, *“even the demons are subject to your name!” (Luke 10:17).*

But all news reported was not good news. The bad news was that not everyone was standing with open arms waiting to hear the good news of repentance from sin.

When Jesus sent out the 70 servants He warned them, *And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matthew 10:14-23).*

Probably the twelve servants experienced this to some extent. Certainly the seventy did. But all of Christ’s servants had experienced just a taste of what their future held. When James and John (through their mother) requested the prime positions of authority in the coming kingdom, *Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are*

able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized” (Mark 10:38-39).

Jesus warned all of the disciples that conflict, difficulty and even wounds is the normal reality for His servants. “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” (Matthew 10:24-25).

And so within days of the founding of the Church, persecution against it started with Saul and the death of Stephan. Within ten years of Jesus giving this warning, James was the first of the apostles to face the reality. Luke recorded, *About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:1-3).* This was Herod Agrippa, the nephew of Herod Antipas who had killed John the baptizer. In this case, he killed James son of Zebadee, brother of John who wrote the Gospel, the three letters, and the Revelation. It is interesting that the first apostle to die and last apostle to die were brothers who “drank the cup.”

And all of us who love and serve Jesus will face various levels of trials and difficulty and wounds. We will need rest and rejuvenation. That is the Master’s prescribed important therapy. We who love Jesus and want to serve Him need to learn to come away by yourselves with Jesus. *And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat (v.31).*

We must admit that we are busy and sometimes worn to a frazzle spiritually and physically. Because that is true, we need to take periodic vacations not to be entertained but to be with Jesus. Get away and read a book. Rest. Pray. And in the meantime, make Jesus the focus of a daily time of resting in His promises.

Like the disciples of old, we need to meet Jesus in the desolate place. *And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves (v.32).* It’s hard to meet with Jesus in the rat race. Therefore, we need to create a time and place where others should not

interrupt us. Some people need to have a literal prayer closet like Miss Clara in “The War Room” had. You should teach your family to respect your time alone with Jesus. They ought to know what you are doing in that desolate place.

Of course the word desolate in our text refers to a place where there is nothing. In this case, it would have meant no town, no stores, no people. In our case, it probably means no computer, no phone, no television, and no people might be the best setting. To get alone with Jesus we need to be away from distractions. The benefit of this coming apart with Jesus cannot be explained—it must be experienced.

The twelve went away to a desolate place with Jesus to be reinvigorated and still there are disruptions. Just about the time the disciples were alone with Jesus some 15,000 to 20,000 people showed up. Sometimes this kind of thing happens because getting alone with the Master is so important that Satan will do what he can to make sure it won’t happen. Did Satan know that within a few hours these disciples were going to be tossed about on a stormy sea, which is why he didn’t want them gaining strength in Jesus?

Satan’s chief desire for you and me is that we will fail. He desires for us to fail to trust Jesus, to fail to love Jesus, to fail to keep Jesus’ commands, to fail to represent Jesus, to fail to tell others the good news about Jesus. And failing to meet with Jesus alone will pretty much guarantee all those other failures.

Jesus died and rose again in order that we can be justified, reconciled with God. But that is not the end of the story. We are made right with God so that we can enjoy fellowship with Him. Our Lord knows that fellowship with Him is the only way we will be strengthened to serve Him faithfully. We are wise to trust our Lord enough to spend time with Him.