

Jesus' new missional community (Mark 3: 7-19)

A Multitude at the Lakeside

7 Jesus departed with his disciples to the lake, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; ⁸hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; ¹⁰for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. ¹¹Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!' ¹²But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

Jesus Appoints the Twelve

13 He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, ¹⁵and to have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

(Translation © Lawrence Moore, *Mark for Missional Disciples*, Walking the Walk Publications, 2018)

Commentary

The series of confrontations with the social/religious/political order of the day reaches crunch point in 3:6: “The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him”. The stage is set: there is no possibility of accommodation between the two worlds of the Kingdom and the old order. Either Jesus will overthrow the old world, or it will kill him in order to neutralise the threat.

The mission [contd] (vv 7-12)

While we tend to draw clear distinctions between our different “worlds”

(religious/political, ethical/economic, physical/spiritual), Jesus emphasises their interconnectedness. Confrontation with Rome, the purity system, the debt system and the demons are all of a piece. Healing and political liberation, the provision of food and the restoration of broken communities all belong together. This is because salvation, for him, is nothing short than bringing a new world to birth: the Kingdom of God.

In contrast to his reception among the Jewish religious and political leaders (the Pharisees and Herodians), Jesus' mission among the Galilean peasant villages is threatened by its own success. Jesus is mobbed. He is in physical danger of being crushed by the crowds (v9).

There is a lesson here: engaging with the scale of need in the world can be exhausting. Compassion fatigue and burn-out – these are realities Jesus has to confront. His response is twofold: to create distance and to enlist help. In the first instance, he uses a boat to put enough distance between himself and the crowds to carry on his mission effectively. In the second, he creates a missional community from among his disciples.

A missional community (vv 13-19)

Jesus creates a missional community from among his disciples. The disciples (followers) become apostles (sent out) in order to share in Jesus' mission. Their task is twofold: proclamation and confrontation (v15). It isn't until chapter 6 that Jesus will actually send them out. But Mark makes it clear that the point of this hand-picked community of Jesus-followers is to share in his mission, rather than to enjoy some sort of favoured status.

We need to recognise an important development that has taken place between the time Jesus called The Twelve during his ministry in the Galilee and the time when Mark wrote his gospel. Jesus almost certainly had no sense or intention here of creating the church; Mark, by contrast, clearly understands his own church community as the direct descendants of this selection process, and inheritors of the same mission mandate.

What are we to make of this? At least three important points follow: firstly, Jesus did intend to create a community of people that lived as though God already reigned over the world. Christian faith is not just a matter of individual faith, or relationship with God; it has a social and communal nature. The church is faithful to Jesus' intention and vision when it is the visible sign of what happens when the world begins to become the Kingdom of God.

Secondly, the church is constituted by sharing in Jesus' ministry and mission. It doesn't exist for its own sake. It isn't valuable because of its history in the formation of our society and culture: it is meant to be a mission organisation, not a museum. And it is authentically and most faithfully the church (ie the community Jesus intended to form) when it is most recognisably like Jesus, experienced as Good News and making a Jesus-shaped difference to the lives and communities of its people.

The last name on the list of The Twelve is Judas Iscariot, "who betrayed him". That is a sober reminder: someone chosen personally by Jesus to share his life and company ended up selling him out. It means, thirdly, that the church hangs constantly in the balance between two possibilities: being a sign of the Kingdom of God and part of the Good News of Jesus that it proclaims, or of being part of that from which the world needs saving.

“A government in waiting” (vv 13-19)

Mark’s framing of the story is deeply symbolic. Jesus, like Moses at Sinai, goes up a mountain (v13) and chooses twelve, whom he names apostles (v14). The parallels between the founding moment of Israel as a nation and this founding moment of a new community can’t be missed: Mark clearly understands the church as the “New Israel”.

This is familiar church territory: the church is the New Israel; baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the New Covenant; the Beatitudes replace the Torah as the New Law, etc. This exclusively “religious” (or theological) understanding of the church hides the political symbolic significance of what Jesus is doing here. This would not have been lost on Mark’s hearers!

Mark has presented Jesus confronting and repudiating the current order. He has done so “with authority” and power (cf 1:27). Jesus will later call his disciples to “deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow” (Mark 8:34), which many scholars take to be a direct quotation from a Zealot recruiting poster, announcing the beginning of a new uprising against Rome. Mark’s Palestinian audience would have been excited to hear Jesus now going on to form a “revolutionary committee”; a “government in waiting”.

The more strongly they heard notes of the church as the New Israel, the more strongly they would have understood these new elders (The Twelve) as a sign of God’s reign beginning to take shape in their midst. The church was the visible sign that their prayers for the new world of God’s Kingdom were being answered.

Going deeper into the text (Mark 3: 7-19)

I love the story of the call of Gideon that we find in Judges 6: 11-24. We're told that:

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak tree in Ophrah. There he spotted Gideon, son of Joash the Abiezrite. Well, I say "spotted" him; he probably heard him rather than saw him. Gideon was secretly threshing corn in the wine press in order to hide it from the Midianites (their cruel overlords at the time). He didn't want the Midianites to spot the harvest and come down and raid the farm. So Gideon threshed secretly, appearing occasionally like a meerkat to scan the horizon for marauding Midianites.

It is over to this man that the angel strolls: less than courageous, prudent, cautious, but certainly no soldier. The angel appeared over the edge of the wine press, probably scaring Gideon half to death. As the shaken Israelite tries to pull himself together, the angel of the Lord speaks and says, "The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior!"

This is the first recorded incident of an angel being sarcastic in the Old Testament. But of course, the joke becomes the truth: Gideon did in the end become a mighty warrior. God makes strange choices in calling folk.

Gideon called to be a warrior, then in truth he was a wee bit of a coward: he seems to be in the long line of disciples called by God to roles for which they seem particularly ill-suited!

- Abraham seemed ill-suited to walk around the world looking for a

promised land at his age

- Moses seemed ill-suited to communicating with pharaohs, given his stutter that puzzled even the sheep
- Judas, Peter, Thomas, James and John ... in fact, all of the disciples seemed ill-suited to the call to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost of discipleship
- James and John, nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" by Jesus because of their fiery tempers, became leaders of the church in Jerusalem at a time when cool heads were needed
- Peter, nicknamed "The Rock" (the "steady one") by Jesus became a leader who consistently promised more than he could deliver

We could go on and on. The point is that God regularly calls folk who seem ill-suited to the task.

Some questions:

1. In what ways are you ill-suited to the task to which God has called you?
2. In what ways is 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31 true for your church?
3. What nickname do you think Jesus would give you as one of his disciples?
4. Did you know that there is no consistent list of The Twelve in the four gospels? Isn't that extraordinary? A good website to check out a summary of the who and what of the original 12 disciples is <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/0/18395824>

All age worship ideas (Mark 3: 7-19)

Theme: JESUS BUILDS HIS TEAM

Activity: The week before - Invite everyone to come in a team shirt be that football, rugby, hockey, netball etc.

All of these represent team sports – the aim/end result may be to get a ball or puck in a net or through a hoop but it is the collective effort, skills, movement and energy of the team in the face of opposition that makes it possible.

Activity: Two teams of 5 or 6 (cross generational) One person in each team is appointed Master Builder. The other team members are the sole resources the builder has to create. All the resources must be used for each task. Each builder is invited to create first a ship – once done give marks out of 10. Then invite the builder to create a suspension bridge – again score. Finally, each builder creates a cathedral – score again then tot up the final scores.

Obviously you can vary the numbers of people involved or the structures you ask the builders to make. It is probably worth putting a time limit on each task.

Jesus doesn't appoint randomly but intentionally and the discipline these apostles conform to is to be with him, to be sent out, and to oppose evil or anything that denies life in the kingdom. These men are to be shaped into a team that not only impacts on the local community in a tiny backwater of the Roman Empire but across the Empire itself and the world at large in both present and future.

How are we submitting ourselves to be shaped by God? Are we the

kind of people who are ready to spend time with Jesus and then be sent out into the world around us to own our faith in Christ and oppose the evil and life-denying structures or 'demons' that affect our world today?

Prayer:

The Covenant Prayer by John Wesley is a useful tool to reflect on

The Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you or laid aside for you,
exalted for you or brought low for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.

**And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.**

So be it.

**And the covenant made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.**

Amen.

This is a simple prayer that I have used on Covenant Sundays where children and young people have shared in the service. This is their 'covenant' but the whole family shares in it

God be in my head
So I may understand your ways.

God be in my eyes
So I can see you at work.
God be in my mouth
So I may speak your truth.

God be in my heart
So I may always be loving
God be in my hands
And in everything I do.

God be in my feet
As I follow Jesus, today and every day.

Amen

Music:

An Army of Ordinary People

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1WkgfhRdl4>

Cornerstone (Hillsong) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izrk-erhDdk>

Liturgies and hymns (Mark 3: 7-19)

This is where you can find hymn suggestions and liturgies for use with this week's text.

HYMNS

Take up your cross and follow me!

Tune: R&S 136 (Gonfalon Royal)

Take up your cross and follow me!
Dare risk upsetting powers-that-be –
the forces shaping life and thought;
expose the webs in which we're caught.

Take up your cross at one with those
whose role as scapegoats grows and grows;
so love 'the least', who give, give, give –
those asked to die before they live.

Take up your cross – the Empire's tool –
though it may make you seem a fool;
but not to bless the fear it spreads,
instead to drain its poisoned threads:

Denounce the lie that 'might is right';
that says the poor deserve their plight.
Take up your cross and follow me:
the kingdom's truth shall set you free!
Amen.

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R&S 520

For ourselves no longer living,
let us live for Christ alone;
of ourselves more strongly giving,
go as far as he has gone:

Son of God who chose to be
one with us to set us free.

If we are to live with others,
share as equals human worth,
join the round of sisters, brothers,
that encircles all the earth!

All the fullness earth affords,
is the people's, is the Lord's.

Fighting fear and exploitation
is our daily common call;
finding selfhood, building nations,
sharing what we have with all.

As the birds that soar in flight,
let us rise and face the light.

Let us rise and join the forces
that combine to do God's will,
wisely using earth's resources,
human energy and skill.

Let us now, by love released,
celebrate the future's feast!

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LITURGY

Call to worship

Let us gather in this moment
just as we are
questioner
sinner
seeker
for we matter to God
more than doctrine, liturgy or creed

Let us gather in this space
just as we are
less than perfect
and fully human
in our needs and longings

Let us gather wherever we find ourselves
just as we are
each of us created in the poetry of love
and formed from the imagination of heaven

let us interrupt the world this morning
wherever we are
and worship God.

~ posted on the website of the **New Kilpatrick Parish
Church** (Bearsden, Scotland). <https://www.nkchurch.org.uk/>

Affirmation: Called by God

This We Believe

I believe in an innovative God,
who does not wait for us to find ourselves
but comes seeking the lost and calling us into a new way.

I believe in Jesus of Nazareth as God's crucial initiative,
that when he calls us to follow, Christ also gives us the power
to become, both in creed and deed, the children of the living God.

I believe in the Spirit by whom Jesus still comes to us,
calling us to follow him into an obedience which is true liberty
and to a humble service which is the fruit of holy friendship.
I believe in the church as the fellowship of Christ's people,
called to respect and support one another through joys and tribulations
as we travel the road towards the "promised land" of God's future.

Because Christ has called me
in this I truly believe.
Amen.

written by Bruce Prewer, on [Bruce Prewer's Homepage](#). Visit that
site for many other excellent worship resources.

Prayers:

Prayer of confession and intercession

Exciting God, we pray for those people of vision and initiative
who place new challenges before us
and encourage us to catch their vision.

That is not always easy
and we do not necessarily greet these ideas with enthusiasm.

Forgive us our lack of courage.

Fire our imaginations.

Teach us to be more like those first disciples of Jesus
who had no idea what to expect,
yet were prepared to attempt to follow their calling.

Excite us with your vision of your kingdom come on earth –
through the work that we do as Christians.

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Come all you vagabonds (Vagabonds)

1,4.

2nd

A D Dsus4

wait a while, stay a while, wel comed you'll be.
 strength for your bo - dy and
 help - less, the hope less, the
 hap - py, the sad, — the lost and a - lone.
 -cu - sers, a - bu - sers, the

2,3,5.

Chorus

D G D A

food for your soul.
 young and the old. Come to the feast, there is room at
 hurt and ig - nored.

G D A G

Come, let us meet in this place with the King of a

F#7/A# Bm Em D/F# A

wel-comes us in — with the won - der of love and the pow -

Em D/F# 1. A D Dsus4 D Dsus4 D

won der of love and the pow er of grace.

A Asus4 A Asus4 A