

Jesus Sends out the Twelve.

Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus began his ministry saying, "The time has come. The kingdom of heaven is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

With great power Jesus faithfully revealed the kingdom of heaven everywhere he went. Wherever Jesus went suffering and death ended, and the Lord was glorified. Praise to the Lord rang out everywhere Jesus went. It was the kingdom of heaven coming to this fallen world.

In this passage Jesus visits his hometown, his dearest friends and relatives, to bring the kingdom of heaven there as well. But they reject him. Nevertheless, Jesus is more determined to bring his kingdom to the world and sends out his disciples two by two to carry out this work. Let's see how Jesus sent them out and the effect of their work in him.

Most likely Jesus had wanted to visit his hometown for some time but couldn't because of the demands of his ministry.

Finally, though, Jesus could visit his hometown. But it was not simply for a reunion. Jesus wanted to bring the kingdom of heaven to them one by one. Jesus knew the struggles and hopelessness of his hometown people intimately. He wanted to heal all of them and give them the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

When the Sabbath came, Jesus began to teach in the synagogue. What happened when Jesus taught? Many who heard him were amazed. They couldn't believe how great Jesus' teaching was. It seemed unreal. Jesus taught about heavenly things. He taught about God's holiness. He taught about perfect healing and love. He taught about eternal life. And his teaching moved their hearts.

It was not a boring lecture but stirred their hearts and souls and minds. They asked one another, "Where did this man get these

things? What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?"

Jesus' teaching was God's voice that created heaven and earth. Every sentence from Jesus revealed God's wisdom. And his teaching had power to heal and perform miracles.

How should the people respond? Surely, they should praise God for his incredible blessing on them to hear Jesus. But they began to criticize him.

It is astounding that they took offense at Jesus. They took offense at Jesus for having what they didn't have. They took offense at Jesus because he didn't fit into their idea of a servant of God. Jesus was also amazed, by their lack of faith.

He said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home."

Jesus couldn't do any miracles there except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

Jesus comes to bring his kingdom to all people. But they rejected him, partly out of jealousy and partly out of their human understanding of Jesus. When they rejected him, he could perform very few miracles. Jesus really wanted to heal and bless all the people of his hometown. But they missed his blessing because of their lack of faith in him as the Messiah.

How tragic to miss the kingdom of heaven because of jealousy or viewing God's work humanly, rather than with faith.

Jesus was rejected by those whom he loved so dearly. Most would be discouraged and need time to regroup. But not Jesus. Jesus was determined to bring the kingdom of heaven through Galilee, Judea and eventually the world. Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

Jesus' primary ministry was teaching the word of God. Jesus taught the word of God because it had God's life and power in it. In our times too, we need to teach the word of God with determination and faith as a priority.

Not only did Jesus continue proclaiming the kingdom of heaven with authority, but he also began to send out his disciples two by two. It was to expand his ministry even more. Jesus first called the twelve to him.

Everyone loves coming to Jesus who is comforting and caring and makes us secure. But Jesus' calling to himself at this time was to not keep them with him, but to send them out two by two. Jesus was pushing them out to expand the kingdom of heaven.

There are many reasons why Jesus did so. First, Jesus knew he would not remain in the world forever and needed to raise future gospel workers. Second, Jesus wanted his disciples to learn faith. And third, Jesus knew expanding the kingdom of heaven was the most important work in the world, and the only hope for mankind.

What is most important in this time as at any time is bringing the kingdom of heaven to the hearts of all people. People need to be changed from their hearts through the coming of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God's love and peace and joy. Our time needs the coming of the kingdom of heaven, just as in Jesus' time.

Christian fellowship is sweet, and we enjoy comfort from others in faith. We love being near Jesus and receiving his love.

But going out to people who can be hostile is difficult. Yet Jesus sent out the twelve. Jesus sends out his disciples into the difficult and uncomfortable world.

His heart was burning to bring the kingdom of heaven to the world. Jesus was grieved that people were living under the rule of Satan and sent his young disciples out.

The end of verse 7 says, "...and gave them authority over impure spirits." This may be the most important phrase in this passage.

Jesus gave his authority over impure or evil spirits. They were going to free people from the power of evil. They needed spiritual authority to do so. Jesus gave them this authority.

Spiritual authority comes through faith in Jesus and obedience to his word. We need spiritual authority from Jesus to remain in him and to be used to free others with God's power. This power comes through faith in Jesus and obedience to his word.

Jesus also gave the following instructions. "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt."

The disciples were to go with nothing so they could depend on God alone. Taking a staff meant they were to walk a lot. But they were to take nothing else. How could they do so?

Jesus believed God would provide for them. Jesus believed God would bless their journey both spiritually and materially. Jesus never doubted for a second God would bless them. When Jesus uses us to raise his disciples, we need this same kind of faith. We need to plant faith in Jesus' disciples that God will bless them, provide for them and use them greatly. We need Jesus' faith.

The disciples were also not to compromise with those who rejected their message. The disciples were to stay wherever they were welcomed until they left the town. But if any place would not welcome them or listen to them, they were to leave and even shake the dust off their feet as a testimony to their fate.

No one likes to be rejected. Disciples of Jesus are to proclaim Jesus' name and his gospel with great confidence and conviction. These days there is often intense pressure to compromise the gospel to be accepted. We don't do that here at St. Andrew's.

What happened when the disciples went out? The disciples went out as Jesus said and simply preached as Jesus had preached, that people should repent and accept the kingdom of heaven. Then God blessed them with spiritual authority. They drove out many demons and healed many sick people. God shook the countryside with an incredible work of God. The kingdom of heaven advanced powerfully driving out the work of the devil

and healing many people. God freed many people from the devil's torment.

Today we learned the tragedy of rejecting Jesus for any reason. We also learned Jesus' heart to bring the kingdom of heaven to all people, and that he sent the twelve out two by two to carry out this work. We must do the same today.

Mostly we learned that Jesus gives us power when we trust his word and obey him, and we can be used powerfully in Jesus to bring his kingdom to our troubled world. Amen