

The First Reading is from 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

¹ *Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. ²For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought us in. **The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel.**"* ³So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. ⁵At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. ⁹David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. ¹⁰*And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.*

Our New Testament passage this morning comes to us from the Gospel of Mark. Last week we heard of Jesus' miraculous healing powers as an unnamed woman was healed and Jairus' young daughter was raised to life from death. Jesus left the seaside village where these healings took place and headed for his boyhood hometown of Nazareth. Let's hear what happened as he visited his old stomping grounds.

The Second Reading is from Mark 6:1-13

Jesus left that place and came to his hometown [of Nazareth], and his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath Jesus 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! ³Is 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 Jesus.** ⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵**And he could do no deed of power there, except** that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And Jesus was amazed at their unbelief.

Then Jesus went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to **send them out two by two, and gave them authority** over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If 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." ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

The Message – You're It, Now!

Have you ever noticed that you start some projects full of energy, only to have other things press in and redirect your focus? If you're like me, I imagine you have a few projects around your house that have gathered dust. Like the beautiful piece of pottery, I have sitting in my backyard that I have yet to put a plant in, or the few boxes that are still not unpacked and put away. Sometimes, we have to blow off the dust, roll up our sleeves, and just finish these

projects that have gathered dust; while at other times we need to know how to let go of them and just move on.

Jesus knew these truths as he commissioned his disciples for the mission field. There is a time to get down to work. There is also a time to abandon the work and move on. As Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs, he told them what to do if the good news was welcomed and what to do if it was not.

Jesus not only gave these instructions, as part of the commissioning package, Jesus also gave his disciples participatory power in his own authority, for they became an extension of Jesus' healing and prophetic ministry. Jesus instructed them to "travel lightly." Jesus also gave his disciples' guidance on how to deal with inevitable failure, for following Christ does not produce a problem free life. That is, as Christ's disciples we are not insulated from failure.

We don't have to look too far in the gospels to see this! Just look at Jesus himself. In our passage Jesus went to his home town of Nazareth. He probably wanted to see his family and check in with others he knew and hadn't seen for awhile. He is a home town celebrity since his reputation on the road preceded his homecoming. The local priest must have invited him to speak in the synagogue as that is where we find him. Jesus spoke with knowledge, power and conviction. Those in attendance were astounded by his wisdom. They had heard of his deeds of power, the physical and spiritual healings done by his hands and now they had the opportunity to hear him preach in person! Wow!

But, then the mood in the synagogue shifted as murmurings began to circulate. Hey, isn't this just Mary's boy. You know the absent minded one... caught day dreaming in the temple while his family was frantically looking for him. And isn't he the one who spent all of his years in a woodshop. Yep, he made our dining room table, chairs and hutch just a couple of years ago. So where did his wisdom come from as he never had much schooling, let alone college or seminary! What could we possibly learn from this uneducated carpenter's boy, anyway? By the end of the service the synagogue crowd had rejected anything and everything Jesus had said!

Now David was no stranger to failure either. Sure, he had successes. David killed Goliath. David had successes in all his military undertakings in service to Saul; for the Lord was with him... We hear the people chant, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousand." David had failures though. Saul had a price on his head and David fled Israel for his own safety. His military services were turned away by others. Of course, he had many more.

Yet, we heard last week that Saul and Jonathan are dead. Israel is without a leader, so all the tribes of Israel come to David at Hebron. The elders of Israel recounted before David what the Lord said about him, "It is you, David, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you shall rule over Israel." The elders reminded David of his call and then made a covenant with David, anointing him King of Israel at the age of thirty. David's commissioning package, like that of the disciples, included the power of God, for David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.

Did you notice that neither the disciples nor David were independent contractors! They didn't choose to rule or to teach on their own accord. God choose them, David through the prophet Samuel and then the elders, and the disciples through Jesus himself. David could lead and the disciples could teach, preach and heal only as an extension of God's authority and mission. I hear echoes of a passage from the Gospel of John, "Apart from me you can do

nothing.” As Christ’s disciples we have the power to succeed in ministry only by the power and grace of God at work within us and through us.

Now I don’t think Jesus nor any one else considers the possibility of failure music to his or her ears. Not Jesus, not the disciples, and especially not pastors or congregations. None of us like to fail. Yet, understanding how Jesus’ own ministry, his rejection at Nazareth, and more importantly his very death on the cross for our sake and salvation, can give us insights into how we can live through our failures. These two passages have great insight for us in this matter. Jesus faced rejection; the text records that he failed to do much of anything in Nazareth. David faced rejection by Saul. Yet, neither of them gave up. Neither of them sat down and felt sorry for themselves. Jesus didn’t brood over his failure in Nazareth wondering where he went wrong; he didn’t say I’ll keep coming back until they get it. Although Jesus was rejected, he didn’t give up, he just changed venues and went to teach in the surrounding villages. Jesus faced rejection and then he shook off the dust of Nazareth and moved decisively forward, even expanding his reach by commissioning his disciples to go!

Go! But, wait a minute... if we “go” and attempt ministry... there is no guarantee that we will succeed. Just ask Pastor James Peck who spent the last ten years of his ministry working to turn around a church that is closing its doors this coming Sunday. Just ask a church who launched a new program to engage the community, only to have no one from the community show up. Just ask Pastor Craig Groschel whose church opened two satellite campuses in Phoenix, Arizona and both new sites failed miserably and had to close.

In reality, our ministry might fail, too. Yet, none of us want to fail... right? But... why? I believe it is because we have almost a pathological desire and expectation to be liked by everyone. We want to be liked by everyone inside the church and by everyone outside of the church. We want everyone to be happy... so change that is needed to succeed is deemed not good, because change causes unhappiness.

If we “go” as Jesus commissions and do decisive ministry we might make people unhappy by upsetting the status quo. It’s as if we would prefer to do church with no dissatisfaction, no disagreement, no discord, and certainly no failure. It’s as if we have swallowed the heady notion that if we just sow love and compassion inside and outside of our church, we will reap love and compassion – and perhaps even acclaim and recognition. If we are nice, then others will be nice to us.

Yet, this is not the gospel message. Jesus sowed love and compassion and reaped death on a cross. The gospel message is a powerful one, it transforms lives and communities; but, in the process it upsets the status quo. The gospel doesn’t leave us where it found us. Yet, neither is God, who authored the gospel, coercive. Everyone has the freedom to reject the gospel and to reject the church or person bearing the gospel message.

Friends’ rejection and failure are part of the Christian journey. Jesus experienced rejection and failure, so why shouldn’t we? The question for us is, “Are we going to let rejection and failure stop us from daring to do ministry?” Are we going to let the “fear of failure” stop us from going where Christ is calling us to be in ministry?

News flash... if we are living out the gospel then some people won’t like us. If we advocate for justice for those without homes, or stand with immigrants and refugees who have fled their countries to save their lives, or advocate for peace in a culture of violence, somebody is not going to be happy with us. When we speak the truth in love, somebody is not going to

like us. No matter how hard we try, there will always be some people that just won't accept us because of the gospel we proclaim. Knowing this, there comes a time in ministry when we need to shake the dust off our feet and move on.

There comes a time when we have to realize that the investment of our time and energy is not producing returns for God's reign. According to Eugene Peterson's translation Jesus said it this way, "If you're not welcomed, not listened to, quietly withdraw. Don't make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way." Or more traditionally translated "Shake off the dust that is on your feet" and move on. We are to let go and move on. We are to stop and redirect our efforts.

Of course, this is easier said than done. It's tough to shake off the dust of rejection and failure. It's tough to close a church, let alone a program within a church that has provided ministry for many years. It's not pleasant to be rejected and ridiculed for your faith. It is hard to shake off the dust, but it must be done for our wholeness. Jesus commissioned his disciples to "go" knowing that the road ahead would not necessarily be easy.

King David and the disciples were commissioned by God for ministry. As Peterson puts it, "They were God's equipment!" David was called to be king; he was the one equipped to lead God's people. The disciples were called to proclaim the gospel, to cast out demons and to heal the sick; they were equipped to share in Christ's ministry.

Guess what? You and I are God's equipment today. Did you here that – we are God's equipment. Christ has called each and every one of us. God has equipped us. We are God's equipment, instruments, vessels, hands and feet and voice.

I hear Jesus saying to all of us, "You're it, now!" We are an extension of Christ's teaching and healing ministry. Christ has given us authority to do so. Christ has commissioned us for ministry and will see us through whatever ministry failures befall us. Failures, of course, are just learning opportunities in disguise. Or as Mary Pickford wrote, "What we call failure is not the failing down, but the staying down." Jesus didn't stay down. We are not to stay down. We are commissioned to "go," knowing that we will fall down and will need to get up again and again.

So, the question for all of us this morning is simply this, "Are we ready to go?" For you are it, I'm it, we are it. We are God's equipment this day and, in the days, ahead! Yes, we are God's equipment now! Amen.