

“A Community of Hope”

Sermon on July 5, 2009

Mark 6:1-13

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This morning I come to you as the new director of youth and ministry development. Hopefully we have made it abundantly clear up to this point that this change was coming. Pastor Wendy has transitioned out of her role of associate pastor of ministry development and will be focusing her time on developing the ministry of Call, Inc. that the Harrs and Berthelsens founded a few years ago.

So, while my job responsibilities are still very much tied to the youth ministry at Hope, they have widened quite dramatically to also include most of Pastor Wendy’s responsibilities of Ministry Development: children and adult Christian education, small groups, administration and communication, and, perhaps most importantly, helping Hope and its members develop new ministries out of each person’s unique call to know, follow, and serve Jesus Christ.

Pastor Joel suggested I use this Sunday to sort of outline my thoughts about this new position, and I think our scripture texts this week serve as a launching point for some thoughts I have about this new role of mine.

In our passage from Ezekiel (2:1-5), we learn about Ezekiel’s call to go preach repentance to the Israelites. The Psalm for the day (123) reminds us that the call to be children of God is a call that may require hardship, sacrifice, and ridicule. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-10, Paul talks about how his weakness qualifies him to be a minister of the gospel. And in our Gospel text, we see Jesus sending out the twelve for the first time, and it is quite a scary sight. The disciples are utterly unqualified for the task. Up until this point in Mark, they haven’t done a whole lot. They’re most poignant moments occur when:

- In Mark 4, they fail to understand Jesus' parables and need explanations. Mark 4:13 - "Then Jesus said to them, 'Don't you understand this parable?'"
- Jesus calming the storm. Mark 4:40 - "He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'"
- Mark 5:31 - 31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "

Obviously, they are not the cream of the crop. Not only that, but Jesus sends them out resourceless. They are to "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic." And yet, they are still to do the ministry of the kingdom.

All of these passages are instructive for being called to ministry by God, and all of them say that the important thing in ministry is not qualifications, resources, or results, but upon God's call. It is God's call and empowerment that is the only prerequisite for ministry but what does this ministry to which we are called look like?

When Pastor Wendy talks about call, she often uses two key questions: Who am I? and What am I supposed to do? As someone who is responsible for developing this call vision, I will continue to ask this question. But I think I will add two more questions that are applicable to Hope Lutheran Church as a whole. In addition to asking individuals Who am I? and What am I called to Do? I would also like for us to ask ourselves, Who are we? And What are we supposed to do? The difference is subtle, but the implications are vast. Simply put, there are some things that we cannot do alone. Some problems, some initiatives, some projects need a community to make it come together.

I would like to propose a possible solution, and I think the name of our church gives us great direction. Ephesians 1:13-14 says this: “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.”

We are called to be a community that offers HOPE. But there is too much sin in the world, where are we even supposed to start?

Luther's understanding of vocation is, “The call to follow Christ leads not to any religious vocation removed from daily life, but instead it transforms the attitude and understanding one has of the situation in which one already is” (See Marc Kohlden's “Luther on Vocation” in the 1983 Word and World, page 386). My focus is on the part of the statement that says “the situation in which one already is,” and taking that not to mean the occupational, marital, and social situations that currently exist but also one's current geographical situation. The call of Christ is a call that says, look around you and live your faith in this situation, this marriage, this job, and this location.

I gather that most churches have moved beyond understanding vocation as only the call to church ministry. It also seems that many churches have moved beyond speaking about vocation as something other than honoring God in your occupation and career, but in all areas of life. I wonder how many have taught, and more importantly lived, vocation as living out your faith literally where you are located.

Here's what it looked two weeks ago as 13 youth and five adults went to leave some deposits in Arkansas on our annual mission trip: [show video from previous week's mission trip]

I think that part of my job will be to throw stuff up against the wall and see what sticks. So, here are some of just a few ideas that I've had rolling around in my head when I consider how Hope Lutheran Church might be uniquely gifted to offer hope to our local community.

- Home repair work around Cedar Hill
- Gardening or Farming using the excess land we have here at the church
- Cooking – What if we teamed up with the local food pantry and offered classes on cooking to help people stretch their budget?
- Free Financial Services & Counseling
- After School Programs
- Resume Services and Job Help

Now, some people might look at our church and say, if only we had more members we could do this, or, if only we had a great big facility, we could do that, or if only we had more money, or extra staff. And to that, I say, "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic." Our resources and qualifications are irrelevant. What is important is for us to act according to the way that God is calling us. Perhaps one of my ideas that I just listed jumped out at you. Maybe God is calling you to be the jumpstart for that ministry. Or maybe God is calling you in another creative way. What I do know is that God has great things in store for this church if we will slow down and listen to his voice.

I look forward to listening to God's answer to the question: Who are We? And What are We supposed to do?