Irvington Presbyterian Church

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 **“Mission Ready”**

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***Mark 6:1-13***

*Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.****2****When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.*

*“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?****3****Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.*

***4****Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.”****5****He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.****6****He was amazed at their lack of faith.*

*Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.****7****Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.*

***8****These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts.****9****Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.****10****Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.****11****And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”*

***12****They went out and preached that people should repent.****13****They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.*

 ***New International Version***

In honor of Labor Day weekend I want you to picture yourself starting a brand new project. It can be any project. The first obvious question you need to ask is what do I want to accomplish? When you figure that out you could call that your mission. Next you need to define that mission. Briefly state its purpose, that is what will your mission accomplish? Then write out your plan for implementing it. That will be your business plan. Once you do all that you’re going to be what we’re going to call today mission ready. In order to accomplish something new you have to take steps. You can do amazing things if you follow one carefully planned step at a time and don’t let the setbacks derail you. They’re bound to happen.

Now let’s see if we can get the church, mission ready. The first question a church needs to ask is what does it want to accomplish? The church, as the body of Christ, should have the same mission as Jesus. So what was Jesus’ mission? Jesus didn’t build buildings. Jesus didn’t collect weapons. Jesus didn’t take anyone by force. His mission was to save the world from itself. He came to make us one again with God. That’s what his resurrection was all about. He died to overcome death. His mission was to save us and make us his disciples.

So the church’s mission is to tell the world that Jesus came to save us and to make disciples of those who desire to follow him. The way Jesus chose to do that is he selected a group of people whom he could train and send out. My dad was a plumber and I remember his training apprentices to be future plumbers. He never sent a new rookie out to butcher someone’s pipes. They were always mentored first.

Jesus didn’t send his disciples out cold either. Before he would send them out he trained them in his mission. Then he set up a sort of "pilot test" project to see how they would do. He wanted to test how well his brand new on-the-job trainees could take instructions and make them work.

So in our passage today in the Gospel of Mark we see Jesus giving these men a lesson in some very basic matters in how to fulfill their mission. I’m going to use three key words to highlight his work plan: Excess, Time and Respond. In the simplest terms, the basics are: avoid Excesses, use Time wisely, and Respond, don't react, to each new challenge.

Here's what Jesus did. He divided the Twelve into visitation teams of two's. He then sent them down some highways, byways, alleys and lanes in an area they were familiar with. It was intended as a kind of "appetizer" for longer and more arduous journeys they would take later. But listen how direct and to the point his instruction was: *“Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts.****9****Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.*

 The bread, the bag, money and even an extra shirt would make them totally independent of anyone they met. They wouldn’t need the help of anyone. That sounds good, right? Wrong. We’re not designed to be independent. People need to be wanted. The people Jesus was sending them to needed to share with their missionaries to show that they truly appreciated and bought into what they were doing.

The other side of that is things weigh us down. They need fixing. They need cleaning. They need protection. We often talk about how fat weighs us down and nearly every American is talking about losing weight. Why? Fat bogs us down. Things bog us down. Keep to the basics and avoid excesses.

Leo Tolstoy, the author was once a man of abundance until he renounced material assets. His bottom line was, you don't have to accumulate a lot of wealth and a lot of things to know happiness. You can know happiness simply by being alive, knowing the joy of eating when you are hungry, sleeping when you are tired, drinking when you are thirsty, and being embraced when you are lonely and need loving. I like that. Jesus spoke, on many occasions, of the basic rhythm of life: eating and drinking, working and resting, embracing and loving. Jesus in the Gospel of Mark urges us to rid out any and all things that overstress and disturb that basic rhythm.

 The second part of being mission ready is be good managers of time. I want to point out that Mark uses the word "immediately, or "straightway, at least eight times in his short Gospel. To me that says: You have no time to waste. Do not hesitate. Do not mess around with the recalcitrant. Don’t get bogged down with non-essentials.
 It is far more important to live life to its fullest now than to be guilt-ridden and anxious about the tomorrows. A genuine sense of urgency comes when we discover that the life God has given us is so precious that not a moment of it dare be wasted. That's urgency! Avoid excess, take the bare essentials; and be a wise user of time. Daily reflect on how you’re using your time.

 The third part of being mission ready: *"Wherever you are welcomed, stay; If people do not welcome you, leave, and shake the dust off your feet."* Again, what is Jesus saying? Don't get hung up on intellectual and moral arguments. Tell your story and go on. Don't waste your energy reacting to people. Don't be defensive about your doctrines and worship style. Don't get burn-out over a situation you can't change. Instead, look for another direction to go. That's responding, not reacting.
 A widowed lady went into extended grief over the death of her husband. Every week she took flowers to the cemetery. When her doctor learned that she had secluded herself, dropping out of organizations and activities, he said to the grieving woman, "I have two patients in nearby hospitals. They have no family to visit them. Next Sunday, instead of taking flowers to the cemetery, why don't you take them to those two lonely patients? Just say, 'Hello,' to them and see if they need anything; see what you can do for them." Reluctantly, she did it. By that simple act the bitterness started to melt away. Gradually she began to take more flowers to the hospital and fewer to the cemetery. She was on her way to recovery.
 The key to moving on is in the difference between reacting and responding. The rewards of reacting are high blood pressure, insomnia, spastic colon, and burnout. The rewards of moving on and responding to new invitations are a sense of victory, joy, achievement, and satisfaction. Some of the side effects of this fulfillment are likely to be relaxed muscles and a normal flow of adrenalin.

 Jesus gave us a beautiful example in the way he handled rejection at his hometown. He didn’t react. He expressed "surprise" and moved on to other communities. That’s the way Jesus outlines the basics of what you and I know as Christianity, the Faith that inspires, informs, and moves onward with hope. That’s the way Jesus taught the Twelve to work at it.

 So what do you want to accomplish? Define it. Begin with the bare essentials and avoid excesses. Rid out of your life anything and everything that encumbers. What’s dragging you down? Make the best possible use of time and evaluation that daily. Finally respond, don't react, to life's challenges. That's Jesus' way of getting us mission-ready.

 If you don’t know Jesus Christ as your Savior, today is a good day to say “Lord Jesus come into my life and save me.” Would you pray that prayer today? You will accomplish nothing greater in your lifetime than accepting Christ as your Savior.

**TO LEARN MORE**

**Join a Small Group – call the church office for times and location 510/657-3133**

**To learn and encourage one another**

**IF YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO**

**GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s ideal**

**Romans 3:23**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**

**Romans 8:5**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow Him to become the master of our life**

**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below…**

*“Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me.”*