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FCW – November 8, 2015

Mark 6:1-13

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

Then he 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. ¹⁰He 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.

Sorry, We Are Closed

Jesus moves.

Jesus moves from one place to the next—from shore, to sea, to shore. From peoples home to synagogue to the street, from town to town. And Jesus calls his disciples to move, too. Mark says, “*Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.*”

This morning, even for a short move from one pew to the next, you took your purses and jackets — things you don’t technically *need* for worship. But we hear Jesus say: just go! And where you go, let the people there host you, feed you, help you.

The disciples rely on hospitality. We often think of hospitality as us welcoming others into our home. Our role in hospitality is giving guests first dibs on coffee in the morning, putting freshly ironed sheets on our guest bed, and making a special recipe we found on

Pinterest. Now, that's good and polite, and probably makes our southern grandmothers very proud.... (or maybe mine was the only one who used to iron bedsheets???)

But that is not what the disciples are called to do in this story. In our Scripture lesson today, the disciples are called to *receive* hospitality. The disciples are called to see that people, in other places, from other faiths, from other families... have gifts to share, and to let them give. And to not just let them give, but to *receive* their gifts. The disciples are called to be vulnerable, to trust in God's provision, and in the people God created.

It is easy to forget what it is to be vulnerable. We are not often very vulnerable here, in our little church in Forest Acres. We live our faith by coming here week after week, month after month. Most of you sit in the same spot, in the same pew that you have been sitting in for years – some of you for your entire life!

And there is something nice about that consistency. It is comforting to know you have spot, a place. It kind of gives us the “Cheers” feel here at church. You're meeting up with the gang, because sometimes you want to go... *where everybody knows your name*. ☺ That sounds good, right? But, how many of you have sat in the same pew for so long that you don't know the name of at least one person who sits on the other side of the sanctuary??? How many of you are anxious today because you're in a new pew, where the cushion isn't as formed to your back, the heat doesn't warm your feet from the same angle on a cold, dreary day, and you won't get out the door as soon as you normally would? And how many of you, like me, noticed someone who chose *not* to move?

Recently, the people of First Lutheran Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma did something radical. They became vulnerable — and they closed their doors. Instead of sitting in *their* pews on Sunday morning, hearing *their* pastor, having coffee with *their* friends, worshipping in the security of *their* home,... they put up a “Sorry, we are closed!” sign and went out as individuals and pairs and families.

Why? Because in the wake of the recent shootings in houses of worship, like Mother Emmanuel in Charleston and Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, their congregation in Tulsa, recognized that though they lived in a different state, they were part of the same nation — a nation that was founded on the freedom of ALL people to worship, to speak, and to *live*.

Though their church members were a different color than the members lost here in South Carolina, and though they are a different faith tradition than those in Pennsylvania, the members at First Lutheran Tulsa believed that they were created and redeemed by the

same God. And in Christian unity, the leaders of this congregation decided to go and worship with different congregations in their city.

Their pastor, Rob Martin, said, “I’m asking people to get out of their comfort zone and go where they are going to be a minority, racially or ethnically...because we need to get used to it. We can’t sit back and pretend we’re not part of the whole world.”¹

And do you know what happened? Churches heard that this one, small congregation, wanted to extend the ministry of presence and BE with them. So these churches started calling First Lutheran and said things like, “Come worship with us! We’d love for you to join us.” The people of First Lutheran practiced humility, showing solidarity in faith. They became a testimony that the love of Christ *moves* in the world.

There were mixed feelings on closing their church doors. First Lutheran Tulsa has the same kind of worries and fears we do here at Bethel Methodist Columbia. But, they didn’t focus on what a Sunday without offering would do to the budget. Instead, they saw that God’s children – their brothers and sisters had been segregated – physically and spiritually -- for far too long. And they realized they had been a part of the problem.

Pastor Martin said, “It really should not have taken something like this for us to reach out, but it did. I think that’s a story of transformation, that out of horrible acts, something good can come out of it.”² The pastor and the congregation realized that while they, like us, often pray a prayer of confession – they had not lived into the words they spoke.

Think about the words we say before communion each month (found on page 8 of your hymnals if you want to read along...) *Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church... we have not done your will. We have broken your law.... We have rebelled against your love. We have not loved our neighbors... And we have not heard the cry of the needy.*

My friends, how do you feel when you read that prayer?

Well, instead of sitting in sorrow and shame, this church repented. Repentance isn’t just saying, “Sorry God,” or “Sorry neighbor.” Repentance is also *not* dwelling in guilt. To repent, like the kind of repentance that Jesus and the disciples called for, is to have a change of heart, to turn from one’s sins, and to change one’s ways. And so First Lutheran

¹ Sherman, Bill. "First Lutheran Cancels Services to Visit Black Churches." Religion Briefs.. http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/religion/religionhomepage1/religion-briefs---first-lutheran-cancels-services-to-visit/article_539cc51c-261a-52de-b4df-c8172d7ada07.html#user-comment-area.

² Rev. Rob Martin in an interview on Fox 23 News, June 28/29, 2015

repented with a type of repentance that changed not only how they thought or believed in grace and love.... but how they LIVED as disciples, sent out to be the presence of God in the world.

What would it take for you, a child of God, disciple of Christ, to hear Jesus' call? What would it take for your mind to be opened and your feet to move? A miracle? A shooting? A Supreme Court decision? A gentle nudge? How do you begin to feel vulnerable, to be just a little uncomfortable?

My friends, I'm not comfortable today. I don't really like *making you* sit where you're not comfortable. I'd much prefer that we all sit around tables in the fellowship hall and read the Bible over a cup of good coffee, talk about how Greek words have so many meanings. That would be much more comfortable for me. But, the call of discipleship is never that comfy/cozy.

I wanted you to worship with a different point of view this morning, to hear how the music carries to a different part of the sanctuary, to see the candles and windows from a new angle, to meet and befriend another member of our church.

I wanted you to see and feel God moving in, with, and through you. I can't make you feel sent like the disciples. I can't make you part of this story. I can't make you *hear* or *go* where Jesus is calling. I *can* tell you, though, Jesus *is* calling.

In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has made YOU part of his story. And the people of God are called to be vulnerable. To get over ourselves. To let Christ take our own anxieties and faults, to let ourselves be moved and changed. I'm not asking for us to close our doors next week. But I AM asking you to think about what *actually* closes us off from God — our hearts, our minds and our doors.

I am asking you to look at this story from the Gospel of Mark today and to see that, while, yes, God loves you no matter what, you are called to respond and to BE disciples. You are called to trust radically and live actively.... despite whatever guilt, anxiety, shame, and discomfort you have.

What makes you uncomfortable?

What plants you, unmovable, in your pew?

What holds you back from moving with the Spirit of God to do Christ's work?

What closes your mind and hinders you from giving *and* receiving? Too many shoes and tunics? The security of your wallet? A person? A place?

We all have *something* which keeps us from fully living the life of discipleship. What is it for you? Think for a moment about what prevents YOU from repenting and changing. What holds you back from hearing and responding to God's call on your life?? I ask that you write a word or phrase which reminds you of that on your bulletin.

An important part of worship is that it's a way to practice for living in the real world. If we don't (or can't!) move in here, how are we going to move out there?!?? This is why we moved seats today. This is why we are thinking about what holds us back. We need to practice being true to ourselves — our weaknesses and our call to discipleship — in HERE, so that we can be true signs of God's love and grace out THERE.

Now -- whatever you wrote down on your bulletin today, cross it out. Whatever weakness you thought about — God forgives. Your salvation, your overcoming that fear, or opening your heart and mind, is solely dependent on the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

And, the Good News? God doesn't care what you wrote on that piece of paper. God cares about *you* and God cares about *all the world*. God takes that hindrance, that weakness of yours, and makes you strong. He says to you, as he said to his servant Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

My friends, the grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient for you. It is enough. To make you his child and disciple. Enough to heal you, to call you, to *change* you. May it be so.

Let us pray: Holy God, we pray today that you would take whatever it is that is closing us off from your love and transform it for your purposes. Open us up to your call of discipleship and make us signs of your grace in the world, in our community, in our lives. We pray in your holy name. Amen.