

Scripture: Mark 3:7-19

Text: Mark 3:13-19

Jesus Forms a New Community of Believers

Beloved in Christ, “But Jesus withdrew”. That’s how verse 7 begins. So why does Jesus withdraw with His disciples to the sea? The Pharisees, the religious leaders, didn’t want Jesus. They reject Him, the Son of Man who has authority to forgive sin [2:10], the Son of Man who is the Lord of the Sabbath [2:28].

Now they want to kill Him. The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees intensifies. We read in verse 6, that the Pharisees go out. They plot with the Herodians, the politicians of the day, against Jesus, “how they might destroy Him.”

“But Jesus withdrew....” [verse 7]. There is separation. Cooperation with them had become impossible. “He withdrew” marks a sharp break between Jesus and them. He withdraws to form a new community. The crowds, the common people, want Him. They *“followed Him”* [v.7]. They *“came to Him”* [v.8] from all over! Multitudes come from Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem, from Idumea and beyond the Jordan and even the Gentiles from Tyre and Sidon. They are pressing into the kingdom. He heals many who had afflictions. They *“pressed about Him to touch Him”* [v.9]. He even asks His disciples to have a boat ready for Him, so that the crowds don’t crush Him.

He had come for the very purpose of giving His life as a ransom for many [Mark 10:45]. He felt the need therefore of appointing witnesses. Through His own work in them, He would gather His church after His death and resurrection.

From Mark 3:13-19, we see that through His apostles, Jesus will form a new community of believers for His kingdom.

1. He appoints them [vv.13,14a, 16-19]
2. He sends them out [vv.14b,15]

He appoints them

We read in verses 13-14a, *“And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him...”*

Note, in the first place, that Jesus now goes up on the mountain. The whole night before, He spent in prayer on the mountain [Luke 6:12]. In the Bible, a mountain is usually where significant events takes place. For example, on Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments for Israel.

He calls to Himself those whom He wanted on the mountain. They come. They come because He calls! We don’t know how many, but they were followers of Jesus. We are reminded of Moses when he went up the mountain of God with 70 others, enjoying fellowship with God, eating and drinking [Exodus 24:9-11].

So likewise here, there must have been many people who spent unforgettable hours with Jesus on the mountain.

Privileged! But so are we a privileged people in all the world! Christ still calls us to speak to us, His people, through His Word. He does. We have it even better. *"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God..."* [Hebrews 12:22].

Second, notice that from the large number of followers He called, He appointed twelve of His disciples to be apostles. Apostle means "sent one." The apostles were chosen by Jesus whom He sends out into the world with His message! An apostle was an eyewitness of Jesus; meaning, that he was with Jesus while He was here on earth.

So why did He appoint 12 disciples to be apostles? Why 12? Think back to the Old Testament.

When God called Abraham, He gave him many promises including this one, *"in you, all the nations shall be blessed"* [Genesis 12:3]. From Abraham, Isaac and then Jacob, God formed 12 tribes from the twelve sons of Jacob called Israel, the Old Testament church. God preserved the twelve tribes of Israel throughout the Old Testament so that the Savior would come into the world through her.

Now the Savior has come! He fulfills God's promise to Abraham! In Christ, the blessing of salvation is for all nations. You see hints of that in verses 7-12. Not only Jews were coming to Christ but also the Gentiles from Idumea, Tyre and Sidon.

The Pharisees, and Israel as a whole, failed to see God's purpose for them. He blessed them to be a blessing to the nations. They wanted to keep it for themselves. In rejecting Christ, they reject the salvation He offers. They reject His call, His mission.

Now Christ, having withdrawn from the Pharisees, will form a new community of believers to bear witness to Him. He chooses His apostles from among the Jews, common Jews: fishermen, a tax-collector and others.. Jesus will train them and send them out to bring the message of Christ to the nations!

Through the apostles, Christ will form the new Israel to bear witness to Him throughout the whole world. Their names are listed in verses 16-19: Simon [Peter], James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite; and Judas Iscariot, "who also betrayed Him."

Interesting – some of them we know better than others. Some we don't hear of again! They have different personalities, different faults. James and John, 'the sons of Thunder' suggest that they are 'loud ones' or 'hot-tempered.' Mark even mentions the one who betrayed Jesus: Judas, the one who caused much scandal. But Christ will accomplish His purposes for His kingdom through these men or in spite of them. Through them He will form a community of believers for His kingdom.

That was Christ's whole purpose in appointing them – so that they can be sent out to spread the good news of His kingdom. This brings us to our second point

He sends them out

Verse 14 says that He appointed them for two purposes: 1] *"that they might be with Him and 2] that He might send them out..."*

So, “why should they be with Him?” For special training. The way to be like someone is to be with them and learn from them. A child becomes like his parents. Jesus says, “*everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher*” [Luke 6:40].

Jesus appointed His apostles, first of all, so that they might be with Him, learn from Him, be shaped and formed by Him, who is the Word! Through them, He will form the new community of believers by His Word!

One of the wonderful things about teaching a Bible study, for example from Genesis or John, is that believers who learn can teach new believers. It’s not something only the pastor or elder may do, but believers may teach new believers and this way, Jesus by His Spirit continues to form and shape believers by His Word.

A part of the very practical training Jesus gave the apostles was to send them out while He was with them. This was His second purpose for appointing the apostles. But He first sent them out to the people of Israel – to all the people coming to Him in verses 7-12. Only later, after His death, resurrection and ascension and the pouring out His Spirit, He sends them out into the world

He sent them out for two reasons, as we read in **verses 14-15**, 1] “*to preach and 2]to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.*”

His first charge to them was to preach! Not their words, but Christ’s words! The apostles’ were not to preach what they think and feel, but what they have seen and heard! The kingdom has come in Christ. It’s going to grow in spite of opposition. Some will even get killed for calling sinners to repentance and proclaiming faith in the crucified, risen Son of God as the only way by which we are reconciled to God.

Christ also sent the apostles out to have authority to heal sicknesses and cast out demons. These were the powerful signs that, in Him, the kingdom has come. Christ is King. He reverses the curse and brings the blessing of the kingdom to all who believe and surrender their lives to Him! Satan’s domain is being laid to waste. Christ now reigns and brings the joy of redemption to all who believe.

We should remember two things about these signs. 1] These were signs belonging to the apostles specifically, as Paul later says in 2 Corinthians 12:12. 2] But also they were signs. Signs point to something. Certainly Christ can heal today. He is able and many times He does. But even then we still die. But these signs are a foretaste of the glory, the perfection to come. The kingdom of God has come, but not yet in its fullness. The day is coming when all believers will be fully healed and there will be no more death.

Through the apostles here, Christ was beginning to form the new Israel, a community of believers for worldwide witness. His church today is the new Israel! The church is also commissioned by Christ to preach God’s word and to show mercy and compassion in spite of opposition!

Today we no longer have apostles, but we have their Word, the complete Word of God. The world has many words today. But there is one Word that comes with authority from Christ the King. It is the truth, the only truth in the world. We are all called to bear witness to Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. The truth is, “*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him*” [John 3:36].

And this is what makes the political and religious groups in our world really upset today. As in Jesus day, they are hostile to Christ because He claims to be the Son of God. This is why they killed Him. The gospel is first that Jesus died and rose again from the dead. Second, it is for those who repent of their sin and call on Jesus as Savior and Lord!

Christians suffer. Christians are persecuted for this message. The world wants to win us over, to destroy our faith and obedience to His Word. Do you feel the tug and pull and call of the world? Christ calls you. He delivers us from the power of evil through faith! We are overcomers through faith in Christ.

At the same time, Christ calls you to be agents of His mercy, love and compassion today. The church is to be an agent of Christ's healing today. Today, Christ's powerful signs are seen in lives changed by the Holy Spirit: healed alcoholics, healed marriages, healed tongues that no longer speak lies, and lives marked by peace. You are the connection to Christ for so many hurting, oppressed people.

This past week, Hope Centre received a note from a man who is crying for help. He writes, "I am a victim of supernatural forces/black magic." Evil spirits are real, yes. But we don't need to look for a miracle worker. The Holy Spirit uses ordinary Christians like the men Jesus chose. You have His Word. You may direct him to Christ and pray for him. Indeed Christ is Lord over the demons. By surrendering to Christ in faith, Jesus heals, gives peace and leads others into the community of believers.

Like the Pharisees and the Herodians, the world today plots how it might destroy the church. But Christ has gained the victory over His enemies through His death and resurrection. Nothing, no one can stop the progress of His Word [eg. Iran]. His church continues to grow, and victory is assured!

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "*Your kingdom come...*" What does this request mean? The answer in the Heidelberg Catechism is, "Rule us by Your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to You. Keep Your church strong and add to it. Destroy the devil's work; destroy every force which revolts against You and every conspiracy against Your Word. Do this until your kingdom is so complete and perfect that in it You are all in all" [QA 123].

Be assured of this on the basis of God's promise in His Word. Amen.