

2024 Mark 6 Success!

In our Gospel reading today the disciples are sent out and their ministry mirrors that of Christ's.

In its message –“repent!” In its victories – victory over the unclean spirits and over sickness.

What about in its failures?

“What?!” You ask, “Jesus’ ministry did not fail!” And you know what? Amen, it didn't. His ministry won a mighty salvation for the world. But it had its hardship, its rejection. We see that clearly in our text today. So what do we make of that?

Is that a failure on his part that some rejected? “Maybe he should have made his message more relevant?” Are we really going to sit here and say Jesus needed to “spice his presentation” up a little bit to convert those folks in Nazareth? Are we going to say he needed to “rethink how to really engage those who were too familiar with him?”

Or does it mean the hearers stopped their ears, walled their hearts, and rejected his message?

He “marvels” at their unbelief. Why? Because everything is right there in front of them! It's astounding that they can't see it! His marveling implies he had given them everything they needed to believe the truth. Which means we know the problem, at least there in Nazareth, was not the presentation of the Kingdom of God and the Messiah, but the problem was in the eyes, ears, minds, and hearts of those given to receive it.

And yet we get so caught up with what we are doing that could attract more and more people to hear the Gospel! And I get it: we aren't Jesus – we don't preach as good as him. Isn't that the truth! We do fail – he doesn't. And I get it: we can only control what we can control. So it is right to think critically about how to present the Gospel. Paul does this, he becomes “all things to all people that he might save some.” That is him engaging the culture and the people.

But there does come a time when you are just a salesman. And that point can be hard to pinpoint. But there is a line somewhere when we turn the Gospel, the Successful ministry of Jesus to save, when we turn that into a sales pitch rather than a proclamation.

I think that line is generally around when you start compromising faithfulness to God's Word. "Let's leave this bit out that is unappealing so we can get some people in here." Well, isn't God's Word what works to save? So we water it down in hopes that it will work better? That doesn't seem to make sense. How is watering down the active ingredient going to make it better?

I will say, there is a time and place for bringing people from milk to meat, but that's not what I'm talking about, I'm talking about a salesman who knows there is a flaw in the product so he has to avoid it to make the sale. Is there a flaw in the "product" of God's Word? Not at all.

And so Jesus and his apostles give it. Even that Law part people don't want to hear. They say, "Repent!" That's the law! "So unwelcoming!" But then they cast out the darkness and bring light and life: The Gospel. And so we, the Church, have a proclamation, not a sales pitch. We have a product that is time tested and stronger than all, what do we have to be afraid of – tell the good news!

And so we proclaim! Ah, but here we are back around at the problem again. We proclaim... and then we look around and we see what? Dozens racing through the doors? "Uh, God, it doesn't seem to be working!"

Where are the thousands of converts!?! Forget thousands, we'd take 5! Where are they?

We panic. We look at a dying world and we want to shout, "God, if your Word is supposed to get this done, not us, well - why aren't you doing more?" And we want to shout at the preachers and our churches, "Why aren't you doing more?" And we in the Church see this, and know this, and

feel guilty and so we are desperately looking around for the silver bullet that will convert thousands with trainings and seminars and statistics, with business practices, with you name it... and round and round the cycle goes.

And then, here in our text, Jesus sends out the twelve with no money, no bread, no bag, just the clothes on their backs and a staff. Or in other words, he sends them out with nothing but the Word.

And for some who reject that Word there is dust, yes, sadly. But for others there is healing and the darkness of the demonic recedes.

Was their sending a success? They seem to think so, they come back rejoicing.

But then what of the failures? Those who rejected the word. And what of their hearts and minds and eternal lives?

And once more we want to ask: "What can WE do?" But is that even the right question?

What can Christ do? What has he done already? For sinners, for rebels who have foolishly wandered, for you and me?

He was despised and rejected. He was beaten and killed. He died. And I bet his ministry looked like a failure then. He was dead, the disciples scattered. Nothing to do but go buy some spices. But they were never used, because he rose victorious over all. That is no failure.

And his light, and this Word of forgiveness and resurrection does go forth and it breaks down hearts of stone, it goes into apathetic ears, it plants little mustard seeds.

It comes to foolish rebels like us with our walls and fears and doubts and sins and it works its way into a crack in our armor. And it works, so much so that we stand and confess our sins, and

confess his saving Name. And when we drop dead, will that Word work? Will our mighty God act to save? Yes he will. He will bring us to life, he is no failure.

And so when we see a world raging against God and his truth, persecuting it, insulting it, ignoring it, I think we are invited to see this darkness not as a failure on God's part, as if he was weak, or lazy, or un-caring. But to see this as a failure in the broken hearts and minds of sinful people. Which isn't to say we should rejoice in them foolishly pushing God away as if they deserve the bad stuff more than we do, no way, we all deserve to be lost and cast aside.

But in mercy his Word has broken in on us! Might we pray it does the same with the world! And as we mourn that some continue to reject his word, and we pray that God would push a little harder on that person we love, and we feel guilty for not knowing the right words, and as we begin to doubt if God truly does care... come back once more to His Word and find that our Lord knows what rejection is like. See how his heart hurts for the lost too, how he weeps for the lost too, and, lest we think he still doesn't care, remember he has died for them too. A death he didn't have to offer. But he has, so that anyone, any time, from Ezekiel's rebels facing stern consequences, to the hardened atheist today, any, any, who should call upon him, a victory is waiting for them that instant.

A victory, we see today that Jesus, a man of sorrows yes, but a victory that he, along with his angels, can find time to rejoice in. Yes, we should rejoice in the successes, in the wins, in the work of the kingdom to bring forgiveness, life, and victory to a dark world.

The baptism at the prison doesn't make it on the news so you don't see it. But it happened. The husband and wife who forgive each other doesn't make it on the TV but it does happen as God's Word works. The new catechism members in the Puerto Rico Churches do make it on that

bulletin board, but we don't all read it, but it does happen. And how much more around the world? God at Work. Reasons for rejoicing.

There is a place for evangelism techniques. There is a place for strategy. There is a place for infrastructure and governance in the Church. But none of those define it, It's the Lord's Church and he will watch over it, he will guide it, he will grant it success. He does not fail. He cannot fail.

Today we have an invitation to rest in that work of his. He will see to it. Today we have an invitation to rejoice in the victory he wins, even more, in that he has called you, by name, to share in that victory with him. God be praised. Amen.