



Fifteenth Sunday Ordinary Time 2006

Amos 7:12-15 Ephesians 1:3-14 Mark 6:7-13

The first half of Mark's gospel can be broken into three major sections. 1:16-3:12; 3:13-6:6; 6:7-8:26.

Each section opens with a story about the disciples and each concludes with a story about the negative response to Jesus' ministry. Our story today has a narrative framework around three sayings.

The tone suggests that they could have been part of a larger collection of instructive sayings used by the early community. The practice of sending people out, on the mission of Jesus, in two's is very old. The Markan community sees it as coming from Jesus' own practice. The Acts of the Apostles gives many examples of this pairing for ministry.

The "sending" was a going in the place and name of Jesus. The first instruction seems very harsh. Take a good walking stick and sandals-no food, money, collecting bag, or no extra coat.

What does this say about the correct attitude for a disciple? It means a putting of one's life on the line. We are disciples by virtue of what we bring to the role but by the call of God. The journey is to be taken in the name of God. God will provide through the generosity of the hearers of the Word. The disciple is a channel between God and God's people.

The second instruction is also clear. When invited to stay, stay put for the duration of the visit. There seemed to be some warning about "shopping around" maybe for better accommodation; perhaps because the hospitality of poorer people was ignored in favour of the rich. Later, some would take this to the extreme, and some itinerant missionaries were difficult to dislodge, so an extended stay came to be read as a sign of a false prophet.

The third instruction concerns rejection. It is not altogether clear to us. Jews, when returning from gentile territory, customarily shook the dust from their feet symbolising the re-entering of their home. It could have meant that the place was declared "out of bounds" in terms of future visits or it could mean a sort of "letting go".

In our context, it suggests that the gospel is to be offered as gift. It is up to the hearer to decide to accept it. God's word should be offered in freedom and received in freedom. There is a glimpse here also of the practice of the anointing of the sick with oil, the only reference to such in the gospels.

A reading about a great prophet of social justice, Amos, is linked to this study of discipleship. To understand the passage, read from the beginning of the chapter.

Amos was called a herdsman and he became a scourge to the comfortable flocks that the people had become. He denounced the attitudes of the rich and threatened them with God's anger and rejection. His anger was even poured out against the national sacred shrine. This challenge to the shrine, coupled with the denouncement of established authority, raised the ire of Amaziah, chief priest at the shrine. He denounced Amos to the king and tried to banish the embarrassing prophet.

Amos refused to go on the grounds that, as he wasn't a member of the officially recognised prophets, Amaziah had no authority. Amos would answer to God. Even those whose role is to challenge the sins of church communities can become domesticated and lose sight of the vision of God.

The rejection of the prophet by the establishment points also to Jesus, and to all disciples who would take their mandate seriously.

The letter to the Ephesians reminds us of the dignity of our calling. We are told that we have received the wisdom to understand the mystery of Christ, which will become clearer in the fullness of time. The use of the plural suggests that the wisdom resides in the group and so we need each other to come to a clearer vision of our role in the unfolding of God's dream.

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