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Disciple-making 101: A 90 Day Challenge
Entrusting
Mark 1-7

Last Thursday a bunch of us returned from pilgrimage to Israel. We continued the 90 Day Challenge while we were there, and I must say that reading about Jesus' call to his first disciples while we were on the shore of Galilee, or reading of Jesus' first sermon in Capernaum as we sat in the ancient synagogue there, or reading about Jesus' rejection in Nazareth as we stood on the precipice outside of town where they tried to kill him... certainly brings those passages to life.

If you are visiting this morning, we are one-third of the way through a 90 Day Challenge to read one chapter of a gospel every day and then ask ourselves two questions: What did I learn about Jesus? and What did I learn about disciple-making? How many of you are keeping up with this challenge? I have a confession! I missed Thursday and had to make it up! So, for those of you who might not have a perfect record, join the club! Now, jump back in and keep going!

Each Sunday we are preaching on a disciple-making principle from the seven chapters we've just read. We started Mark this week, and those same themes are being repeated, aren't they? Jesus made disciples by being Intentional—in Mark 1, Jesus calls specific men to follow him... we are to live our spiritual lives on purpose; Relational—in Mark 3, we read that Jesus called his disciples, first of all, to "**be**" with him... disciples are not projects, they are people to be loved; Unflappable—in Mark 4, when Jesus calmed the storm the disciples were terrified because they lacked faith, again, yet Jesus never gave up on them; and finally, Hospitable—in Mark 2, (Pastor Larry preached a great message last week on this theme) Pharisees condemned Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners, but Jesus did some of his best ministry around a shared meal, and he calls us to open our homes our hearts to do the same.

This morning, we discover that Jesus made disciples by Entrusting them with Kingdom work, even though they were totally unqualified. And after last Wednesday, I have a renewed sense of what that feels like. We were visiting our last site; the Garden Tomb where many believe Jesus rose from the dead. This is the high point of the pilgrimage when you are able to enter the empty tomb of Jesus. We were standing outside the tomb, waiting our turn, when suddenly I heard shouts and looked over to see one of our members, Janice, had fallen on the rocky surface outside the tomb. I rushed to her side, hoping she was all right,

but she was not. Her left hand was twisted almost completely sideways; she had broken her wrist.

We had two doctors on the trip and they jumped in, assessing her condition, stabilizing her arm and preparing to transport her to the hospital. They were so competent that, frankly, I felt pretty worthless. In fact, the break was so bad that when I looked at it, it kind of made me sick. But Janice was in obvious pain and frightened, so I did the only thing I could think of: knelt down by her, cradled her head, kissed her forehead and looked into her eyes and talked and prayed and joked with one of my broken sheep.

But I remember feeling so unqualified, so helpless, and like I said, a little queasy. I wonder how many here this morning, when we talk about making disciples, have some of the same emotions? You feel unqualified, helpless, and maybe even a little squeamish? The good news from last week's readings is this: the first disciples felt the same way! And yet we watch as Jesus entrusts and empowers them to do things they never would have imagined possible.

Listen first to this passage from Mark 3:13-14:

¹³Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

Please notice when this experience took place in the gospel. Chapter 3! Jesus has barely gotten started with his ministry. In chapter 1 Jesus calls fishermen to leave their boats and follow him. In chapter 2, he calls a despised tax collector to follow him. These guys are rookies. Greenhorns! And yet, in chapter 3, we read these remarkable words: ¹⁴He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. Wow! Only moments ago they were catching fish and fleecing taxpayers... now they're apostles? Sent out to preach? And given spiritual authority to cast out demons?

Honestly, doesn't this seem a little hasty? How could these guys possibly be ready to preach and cast out evil spirits? How could Jesus take common, ordinary folks and entrust them with such power and authority? How could he entrust his kingdom to people like Peter, James, John, Andrew, Matthew... or like Mark, Carol, Bill, Janice? How is this possible?

As I studied these chapters, I saw a recurring theme that I believe is the secret to how Jesus prepares greenhorns. We find it most clearly in verse 14. Did you notice the first thing Jesus expects of his new apostles? "He appointed twelve... that they might **be** with him..." Notice, it doesn't say that he appointed twelve so that he might teach them or that he might train them. He appointed twelve that

they might **be** with him. Only then does it go on to describe what they would do. Their being preceded their doing.

This brings us back to relational, doesn't it? The way Jesus made disciples was, first of all, by being with them. He focused on a few and poured his life into them. Notice how this idea is repeated again and again. Mark 4:10: "When he was alone [with] the Twelve" he explained the meaning of the parables. In 4:34, "But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything." In 4:35, "That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.'" In 6:31 Jesus says to his disciples, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Jesus prepared his disciples to do great things by being with them. They watched him heal withered hands and a hemorrhaging woman. They watched him raise a dead girl to life. They watched him cast demons out of a pitiful man. They watched him calm a storm with a word. They listened as he taught. They listened as he defied the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. In other words, they were like sponges... soaking up who Jesus was, what he said, how he lived, what he expected.

Ultimately Jesus was able to entrust ministry to his disciples, because he spent so much time with them, they grew to understand his heart and mind. Even though they were green—inexperienced and at times, bumbling—the more time they spent being with Jesus, the more they knew instinctively how to live... and how to help others to live.

That's why we are doing this 90 Day Challenge! It's not just about completing a reading assignment. When we read a gospel chapter, we are asking ourselves the question, "What do I learn about Jesus? What do I learn about his character, his courage, his compassion? What makes him angry and makes him sad and makes him amazed?" Being with Jesus is how we become his useful disciples.

It is also how we make disciples. We are called to be relational. We are called to be hospitable. However unqualified we are, the way we start making disciples is simply to be with people we love! Spend time with them. Get to know them. Invite them to your house for dinner. Take a trip together. The more of your heart and time you invest in people, the more spiritual influence and authority Jesus will entrust to you.

The first five chapters of Mark are mostly about the disciples being with Jesus... coming along for the ride... spending time with, eating with, listening to, watching, soaking it all in. But suddenly comes chapter 6, and the disciples go from being to doing. They are launched! Listen to verse 7.

⁷Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. ⁸These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the

journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. ¹⁰Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.” ¹²They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

After five chapters soaking in the presence of Jesus, suddenly he sends them out... and this isn't just a little preaching mission. He sends them out, two by two, and gives them authority to wage war with evil spirits. And notice this: he sends them intentionally underprepared! They don't have the supplies they need; they haven't raised all their support. Jesus wants them to trust that when he sends them to do battle he will be the one who equips and supplies and sustains them. It is so important that we see this. When Jesus calls us to go make disciples, he wants us to depend upon him... wants us to rely on him to provide the right words and the right spirit at the right time.

This became real to me in Israel when I found myself in a relationship with someone for which I felt unprepared. Before we left, a woman shared with me that her brother, who is a devout practitioner of eastern religions such as Hinduism, was joining us on the trip. Honestly, it made me a little nervous. How would he receive my teaching? What kinds of questions would he have? What should I do? But as I prayed about it, I realized all I needed to do was share the scriptures, and love him and trust the Holy Spirit to do His work. At the end of the trip, I received a wonderful email from him which said in part, “I find my own faith was... enriched, and deepened... The Holy Land has come alive for me, and I return home with a much broader perspective on and understanding of Jesus' life and mission.” That is the work of the Holy Spirit through his underprepared disciple!

And later in chapter 6, we find another example of this. Jesus is teaching the crowds in a remote place and suddenly, the disciples realize it's dinner time. They want Jesus to send the crowds away. Listen:

³⁷But Jesus answered, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸“How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.” ³⁹Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

⁴¹Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²They all ate

and were satisfied, ⁴³and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Again, notice how Jesus entrusts ministry to his disciples even though they are ill-equipped to do what he asks of them. He seeks their advice about what to do. He assigns them to organize the people in groups. He gives them the food to distribute. And afterwards, he has them collect the leftovers in doggie bags... twelve of them, one reminder for every disciple of what happens when they obey Jesus, even though they don't understand it and feel utterly unprepared.

I realize there are some here this morning who are not yet interested in disciple-making. I heard from one woman who sees Christianity as basically spiritual self-improvement... and that's it. She's not interested in this disciple-making thing. But there are many of you who are willing to make disciples but who feel utterly unprepared and unqualified for this task. Here's the good news: Jesus wants to entrust to you the work of his kingdom and he likes people who feel unqualified... because then, they depend upon him to do their work.

I need to finish Janice's story. As she lay on the ground, I held her head, feeling pretty useless. I was trying to think of something comforting to say. And then, I believe the Lord gave me these words, "Janice, you have a rare privilege, right outside the tomb of Jesus, to share in the sufferings of Christ. You will never forget this moment because it will remind you forever of the pain Jesus endured for you; the price that Jesus paid for you." I didn't even get the words out of my mouth before Janice broke out into the most amazing prayer of praise: "Oh, Jesus, you suffered so much more than this for me. I am so grateful for your love. Thank you for dying for me. Oh Jesus, thank you for suffering for me!"

I just hovered there and listened to this outpouring of praise, amazed to realize that despite my inadequacy, the Lord had produced this unlikely moment of powerful worship... right there on the ground outside the empty tomb of Jesus.

As you think about Jesus's call to make disciples, how many of you have said, "But I don't know enough!" or "I'm not qualified!" or "What if I screw it up?" The good word today is this: Jesus loves to take ignorant, underqualified, bumbler... and entrust to them the disciple-making work of his kingdom.