



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"Get in the game" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

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Mark 6:6-13: *6 And Jesus was amazed at the unbelief (of the Nazarenes). Then He went about among the villages teaching. 7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If 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." 12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

Today we continue in our sermon series of Hope Restored. Let me first begin with a short story from my youth.

I played organized football from a young age and I was always a starter. But when I got to high school and I was only 15 and about 30 pounds

skinnier than I am now, there were a lot of guys bigger and stronger than me. So I knew starting was going to be a lot harder to accomplish.

My lack of skill and size created a genuine lack of confidence even though I had been playing football for years. So if the coaches asked for volunteers to step in and take a position in practice or a game I would hang back because my feelings of inadequacy would take over.

Now my father would often see my hesitation to step up and it drove him crazy. So after my sophomore season my dad will drill into me to step up and get in the game anyway I could. If I try and fail don't sweat it, just don't hold back from trying. So in my junior year, during some preseason games, as soon as the coach would come to the sideline and had that look that he was looking for someone to fill a spot. This time however, I would immediately raise my hand and step forward and say I'll go.

Now because I was such an unknown my sophomore year the head coach didn't have a clue who I was as a junior. At

that point in the season all the players had their names written large on the front of their helmets so the coaches could tell who was who. When the coach tried to read my name he promptly mispronounced it.

That day we were scrimmaging against a tough team. However, the first play after I got in there I intercepted the ball. The coaches chuckled and said, "Great job uh, Peach? Pike? Uh, great job kid!"

The next play, because I made a good play and was finally noticed by the coaches, I was so pumped I hit the guy on the other team so hard he had to leave the game. At this point the coaches were cracking up because they didn't have a clue who I was. It was like, "Who in the world is this kid?!"

A few days later we had another scrimmage game and sure enough the coach came to the sideline with that same "Who I can call on?" look. This time he started saying "where's that Peach? Pike? Peck? Uh?" I jumped forward again and got in the game. Sure enough, on the very next play, I intercepted the ball again! Later I would score a 70 yard touchdown.

After that game they never forgot my name again. My point is this, I knew I wasn't super-talented or very strong, but I just took what I had and put it out there and see what happens. It wasn't always pretty and I never made all state. No one will ever write a story about my football exploits, but I did what I could to get in the game and play. And play I did.

I share this because some of us Christians feel like I did as a sophomore. Yes, you know the fundamentals of our faith, but lack the confidence you have what it takes to get in the game and do whatever it is that God wants you to do. Some of us feel the "game" of winning people to Christ, praying for healing, or caring for the poor, etc. are for way better players than ourselves (anyone feel like that?).

Today we see a story of how Jesus takes some of the most ordinary guys and got them into the game and they begin to help to rock the world! Let's look at some interesting features in this story. Right after Jesus was rejected by His hometown of Nazareth, it says in verse 6: *"Then He went about among the villages teaching."* I only want to pause here for a brief moment.

Notice that the Creator of the universe went about teaching in little villages. Do you know how small a village is in ancient Palestine? Nazareth, where Jesus was from, only had about 500 people.

This is encouraging to me because you know what ministry is rarely ever about? Doing the next big thing. I know that such a thought is counterintuitive to our American mindset. We live in a day and in a culture where we feel we have to go big or go home but very often that wasn't the way of Jesus.

It's not that He never taught in big cities. He did: Capernaum, Jericho, Jerusalem etc. But I just want us to notice that many times small venues and small things are really big deals to Jesus. I bring this out to encourage you because you may never lead a bible study of 80 people, or minister to more than a few of the same people for years. Maybe your biggest ministry will be to have a class of 25 kids or to a clientele of 20 people.

The point is, don't let the numbers thing or size thing worry you or keep you out of the game. Success for Christians is not necessarily how big you got something to be, but how faithful you have been to exactly what Jesus gave you to do however small that might be. That doesn't mean we should never see if there is more for us to do. After all, soon after the resurrection people came to Christ by the thousands. So it's not like God doesn't bother Himself with big things but just try to stay focused on and persevere with God's thing for you, whatever size that ministry is.

Now what comes next is a major shift in the gospel of Mark

and in the work of Jesus. I'm going to splice a couple of these verses together to make a coherent picture of what Jesus sent His disciples to do. Mark 6:7 and 12 says: *"He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits... So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them."*

Let's look at a several things here. It says, "Jesus sent them out...so they went out..." The Twelve apostles have done a lot of learning and observing up to this point, but now it was time to get in the game themselves. Jesus had no intention of being a solo artist in His world changing work.

Now if I can be honest, it has been my observation over the years that sometimes we Christians can stay too long on the practice field or sit a little too long in the classroom. It's like we are perpetually getting ready or learning or training, but never feeling like we are quite ready to get in the game.

To be honest, I believe that in many ways most of us are educated way beyond our obedience. So I'm not sure needing more education and training is the main issue for our reticence to get in the game. Besides, there are some things we truly learn only as we try to live it out. For example, how do you learn how to ride and enjoy riding a bicycle?

Did you do it by studying the physics of bike riding for five years? Or the amount of force needed by the human quadriceps to push a pedal? Anyone do that before they dared to get on a bike? Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? We all learned by getting a little instruction and then getting on the bike and start riding it!

Sometimes it's like that with serving God, we need to just get on and get going! Just in case you still think you shouldn't try things because you are just too unfit for getting in the game let me just say this: The mission of God isn't given to spiritual superstars. It is difficult to exaggerate the risk Jesus took right here in sending these disciples out to teach and heal. Thus far, the disciples have not been stellar men. Remember how they freaked out at the storm, or when they were completely baffled by some of Jesus parables? Jesus has already expressed much exasperation toward them.

Later on in the journey even after they get sent out here you will see that they will argue about who is the greatest among the Twelve of them, they don't grasp Jesus' predictions of His death and resurrection, then of course, there is the epic fail of all Twelve at one time in the garden of Gethsemane. You start to get the idea that "unfit" doesn't even begin to describe them!

It reminds me of how early on in the Book of Acts when Jewish leaders were listening to the apostles Peter and John.

The religious leaders said this about them: Acts 4:13 *"When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."*

I want to show you something that I found interesting here in this verse. In the original Greek of the New Testament the word "Ordinary" is (ἰδιώτης) "Idiotes." and I don't have to tell you what word in English we derive from this Greek word! But this word means in Greek a non-expert, an amateur, unskilled.

My point is, does anyone feel like that when you try to do something bold for the Lord? You feel like a non-expert, an amateur, an idiot? But here is the thing, these are the very people whom God has called to change the world. So if you feel inadequate you're in good company. And by the way, let me make a quick point about failure. Don't fear failure; rather expect failure to be part of the journey of getting into the game. Here is something you will never hear from even the most gifted Christians: "Everything we did to win people to Christ totally worked!" If someone does say that to you run the other way because they are lying to you.

Notice also from verses 12 and 13 the disciples proclaim, cast out, and cure sicknesses. In other words, Jesus puts them on a robust holistic ministry just like what He has been doing all this time.

Let me share a story to illustrate this kind of robust, holistic ministry done by a regular (idiotes) Christian guy who lives this out. His name is Craig and he is a recently retired doctor, who doesn't look older than me.

I ran into him the other day and he began to tell me about this amazing ministry he got involved in. He told me he is now ministering to migrant sea fisherman down at the piers (near Nico's). I told him I didn't even know we had any migrant fishermen. He said, "you know all that Ahi we eat in restaurants or buy from stores? These are the guys who bring it to shore."

He said that there are about 700 of these migrant fishermen. They are made up of Filipino, Vietnamese, and Indonesian men. They are mostly middle-aged guys with families and they work on two to three year contracts to fish, which means they don't see their families for two and three years at a time! Talk about hardship!

They fish because they make about four times of what they could make back home. Thus, because they want a better life for their families they make this big sacrifice.

As fishermen they are out at sea three out of four weeks in a month. When they come here they are not allowed to be on US soil, except for a few yards, so a group of people have stepped into the game to reach out to these men (including some folks in our church).

Many of these men have minor health care needs, but some have chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. With some men its' even more severe. Craig told me that some men have had giant fish hooks stuck through their hands and fingers. A few men had to get fingers amputated.

Now in addition to the medical care there are other Christians who help out by bringing food, clothes, offer prayer, and share the gospel through translators. They even provide discipleship training. My friend said hundreds have come to Christ over the years so there is always discipleship training. There is so much more to this story, but let me just finish it with this; the ripple effect of their holistic ministry is enormous. Think about it. Medical care helps them to prevent disability, which in turn keeps them working and providing for their families.

So we need to see that the care provided here helps to improve the lives of many people way over there. The care we give here impacts people we will never meet in our entire lives. Moreover, spiritually speaking, these fishermen, some of who are Muslims from Indonesia, witness to their families back home about how the Christians are taking care of them. Those who are discipled over time eventually go back home and influence their families now as Christian men

Think about this for a minute. Here you have this small

(village size), unreached people group literally floating on a huge ocean. They are not allowed on US soil. By anyone's perspective they arguably look like they could be the most unreachable people for the gospel in the world. Yet God has provided a way on this little island to help them out and bring them the gospel, all because some regular "idiotes" were willing to get in the game and join God in His mission.

Now this brings me back to verse seven where it says they are sent two by two. This probably had a lot of reasons to it, let me share just one. The reality is we will go a lot further in our service and walk with God when we have Spiritual Companions along the way.

There is an African saying that goes like this: *"If you want to walk fast walk alone. If you want to walk far walk with others."* Let me tell you straight up, when you step out to get in the game there will be plenty of times when discouragement will haunt you and failure will happen. This is why having a spiritual companion is not just a "nice thing" to do, its crucial to keeping us going and taking us further in our ministry for the Lord than we would do on our own.

I have mentioned many times that my career as a preacher started out back in 1984 preaching on the streets of N.Y.C. and the only reason I did such a thing was because my closest friend went with me. His companionship and encouragement helped set me on a

ministry that I would continue for the next 34 years. So my question to you is this, who would your partner be in this season of your life?

Now let me touch briefly on what may seem like some odd stuff in these passages. First in verses 8-9 Jesus gives some pretty tight guidelines to His disciples as they go out: "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 seems pretty harsh to our modern minds. Why do this? There is a lot of speculation by scholars as to why He does this, but stop and think about it for a minute. These guys were going to have to carry on the mission of Jesus after He ascends to heaven to the far reaches of the world. They were going to have to travel to places they have never been and figure out how to do what they have never done before. Furthermore, they were going to suffer for Jesus' mission as well.

In other words, they needed to learn deeply, right from the beginning, to trust God's guidance and provision in the face of tremendous pressures, opposition and uncertainties. So I think this part of the reason why Jesus is giving some hard-core training for their future. The other seemingly odd thing to us in the modern world is found in verses 10 and 11: "He said to them, *"Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place."*

To our modern minds this presumption of hospitality may seem odd, but in Middle Eastern society the expectation of hospitality for visiting teachers is pretty standard stuff. So for that time this is nothing odd, just commonplace stuff. But now let's hit verse 11: *"If 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."*

In the ancient world Jews traveling outside Israel were required to shake themselves free of dust when returning home lest they pollute the holy land with Gentile Dirt. But for Jewish men to do it to other Jewish people?

Now that was making a big statement. It was like saying, "if you reject Jesus you are just as lost as a Gentile." It was a way of sending a strong message against any presumption of salvation on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, or on Temple and synagogue attendance. Faith in Jesus alone now became the focal point of what all of Jewish history and spirituality was going to be about.

This got me thinking; do some people today suffer from similar presumptions when it comes to God and spirituality? Today we want to believe when it comes to spirituality and eternal things everyone gets a trophy, no one loses, and everyone's a winner. We never stop to consider how presumptuous all that is. Think about it; the presumption that

we're going to do the God-thing our own way and to top it off, God will have to accept it (if not he is narrow-minded and mean). This is about as presumptuous as you can get.

As unpleasant as this may sound, the presumption that we can reject Jesus the Creator of all there is in the universe, that we can reject The Giver of your life, the One who loved us even in the face of such brutal suffering - to reject that Jesus because we think we have a better way than Him is an arrogance so great and so grave that it simply will not be tolerated. Yes, God loves us sacrificially and unconditionally, but He is no doormat. Jesus makes it abundantly clear in John 14:6 "Jesus said...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

That being said let me also caution us Christians to be careful not to dust off our feet and judge others too quickly. As a missionary in Thailand I discovered very few people become Christians there. Despite 190 years of mission there are still only 1.2% that are Christian. So perseverance with non-Christians and not dusting off your feet too quickly is crucial.

While I ministered there I knew some fellow Christians who saw me trying to witness again and again to my neighbors and said to me: "You are casting your pearls before swine. They are not going to come to Christ. Move on from them."

Well as it turned out one college girl did come to Christ, and within a week she led three other young people to Christ. In just the next couple of years she led more than 20 people to Christ - in Thailand! Now a couple of decades later, she and her pastor husband planted a church in an area that had no Christians.

Over the years she has led scores of people to Jesus. She is also impacting the community in the area of education. Bottom line, this person on whom I was "wasting my time" accomplished more than what a team of foreign missionaries could do in an entire career. So don't be too quick write off, give up on, or judge people. You never know what God might do.

Now before I finish let's consider some practical ideas in how "to get in the game." Let me just share three things. First, take a long, loving and honest look at your insecurities and fears. Pray to God and talk with others about why they are there. Clarity about our own deeper anxieties and insecurities will help us move forward and grow more confident. You can't overcome what you overlook. You can't change what you don't see.

Let me also say this, you may never totally get rid of all insecurities. Even I have them today as I speak to you. But as you face such things in your life you can learn to serve and take risks even as you have those feelings of inadequacies running through your veins.

If you wait for insecure feelings to go completely away you will wait a lifetime and miss out on so much.

Second, if you genuinely lack training proactively seek out what you need. Read a book with others (remember that African saying?). Take a Life Training class and learn with others. Go through some Rightnow Media training videos together with others. Ask someone to disciple you. Attend our weekly "Just Show Up" class. Go to the men's' group on Thursday nights. Join a small group. There are literally all kinds of ways in our church where you can get better equipped and get in the game.

Third, get in the game by taking a genuine and loving interest in someone's life whom you see often. You don't have to go to outer Mongolia to get in the game for Jesus. Just start with the day that is before you. Start with the people that are before you each day. In the morning or throughout your day ask yourself and ask God, "How can I love on this person today? How can I provide listening, healing, or godly wisdom to someone?"

I suggest this approach because in our modern world our "proclaiming" may actually start with a lot of "listening and asking questions." For example, simple questions like these: Tell me your story? I notice you seem a little upset. How can I help you? What are your dreams for your future? You seem a little anxious, what is it that makes you most anxious in

your life right now? When you give that kind of attention and concern you can't believe how much starts to come out of people. I know these questions sound really simple, but I can assure you, rarely do people have others in their lives who ask them questions like this.

Let me finish with yet another story of my youth to illustrate all this. Soon after I was a Christian, I was about 22 years-old and I was working on a construction site building a hotel in New Jersey. I was with guys who acted and spoke in a way that, let's just say, was less than godly. But here's the thing, I would never join in on the depraved parts of conversations and jokes, but I would intentionally try to show a genuine interest in the lives of the men.

I would talk to guys about how they were doing in life. I would talk about their dreams were for their future after this job was finished. I asked about how their relationships were with their girlfriends or with their family, etc. Not exactly typical construction site talk.

Then one day one of the most sarcastic and wisecracking guys on the job asked if you could talk to me alone during the coffee break. So he pulls up two chairs and begins ask me about why I'm into "this God stuff?" I told him my testimony about how God radically changed my life. After that he then begins to open up to me about some of his deep pain in life. This macho Jersey

construction guy starts tearing up like crazy.

After listening for a while I asked if I could pray for him and he said yes. If you don't know by now, trust me, this was highly unusual on a construction site in Jersey. I don't know where he eventually ended up with God in the days after I left that site, but I know this: on that day he heard of Hope that could be found through Jesus Christ.

Here's the reality folks, there will never be enough full time or part time ministers and Christian workers to bring about what God intended for this world. There will never be enough to bring about spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth, to bring about all the discipleship that needs to get done, to bring about all the justice that needs to be implemented, to bring about the end of racism, starvation, and war.

This is why Jesus has called every Christian to get in the game, to get involved in sharing His gospel, caring for the sick, praying for the deliverance from sin and demonic strongholds, etc. Such ministries are not simply for "professionals," but they are the responsibilities of all of us together.

Listen to one Christian as he summarizes what we have been saying: *"A kingdom of God theology is not content with mission being a church-based work. Rather, it applies to the whole life of every believer."*

Every *disciple* is to be an agent of the kingdom of God, and **every disciple** is to carry the mission of God into **every sphere of life**" (Alan Hirsch, *emphasis mine*). Including and especially to construction sites in Jersey!

Brothers and sisters, when this idea permeates and characterizes our lives as Christians hope will indeed be restored to our world through Jesus Christ, because workplaces, communities, relationships, and people will become as God intended.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org
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