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"Driven by Love"
Mark 6: 6b-13
Confirmation 2013

During our confirmation gatherings, that we talked about the Bible's greatest hits, what I called the Bible's top 5: Creation is good; Sabbath is necessary; God loves justice; Nothing can separate us from the love of God; and Love Wins.

On justice day we talked about how the Bible is very concerned with social justice, making sure that everyone has enough, and then we grabbed a very poor translation of the Bible, one of those that lurks in youth rooms everywhere, we asked God for forgiveness and then we ripped out all of the books in the Bible that are fundamentally about justice so that we could see what was left over. You should have seen the delight in the eyes of the confirmands when I said we were going to rip up a bible. Clearly this was what they were hoping for from their confirmation experience.

We ripped out Exodus and the major and minor prophets, half of the Psalms, the book of Revelation (surprise, surprise), and many others and we ended up with a justice pile that was three to four times the size of the rest. If you take justice out of the Bible you don't have much left. And that justice is really about love. God's love for the world and God's call to us to love one another.

The gospels, of course, were in the justice pile. The gospel of Mark begins with Jesus being baptized, he's claimed as beloved, and then sent by the Spirit into his ministry. In verse 14, Jesus shows up in Galilee and he starts proclaiming the good news of God which is, "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." In confirmation class we discussed that when Jesus is proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God, he is contrasting that

with the bad news of the Kingdom of Caesar, the present reality. God doesn't like how Caesar is running the world. There is great injustice, too many people don't have enough, too many people are cast aside as expendable. So God sends Jesus to rescue the world, to save it, to heal it.

Trusting in his belovedness, Jesus starts healing left and right. He's healing people, he's healing a broken world. Wholeness starts spreading. The other thing that Jesus does is he calls disciples. God doesn't ask Jesus to save the world on his own. That's why we're all here. Healing the world is a big job and lots of hands are better than two. That's why we're all here. We multiply the hands of Jesus.

In our passage for today in chapter 6, Jesus has called 12 disciples and he is now sending them out to do what he's been doing. He gives them authority over unclean spirits, over all that messes up life. They are to travel light, "no need to bring your phone," Jesus says, "you won't even need the Bible app." Jesus wants them to share the message that God wants something better for the world and then they are to show this is true with healing actions.

And the disciples do it. They tell other people that God doesn't want the world to be a broken, unjust mess, and show this is true they do great, healing things – things they never thought they could do. This is very interesting, because the disciples in Mark are a bunch of Neanderthals. The disciples in Matthew and Luke have it together but not the disciples in Mark. They never understand what Jesus is trying to say, they say embarrassing things, they fight about who's the greatest (and we're thinking none of you are doing all that well) and they betray Jesus when he needs them most. And yet when sent by Jesus they achieve great things.

This is important because we often feel inadequate, like we don't know enough or we're too young or we're too old or we're too small in a big world. What can we possibly do? And yet this story says if God can do great things through these disciples, then certainly God can do great things through us.

When I have taught confirmation I've always ended up thinking about my own experiences in my teenage years, and the messages I heard at church and those that I didn't. When I was in high school a new pastor drove into town in a beat up Ford Escort. It was Christopher Grundy, a Carleton Grad, active in this church during his college years. For the first time I heard someone talking about how Christianity

is about justice, and I was astonished. Up to that point I thought Christianity was just trying to get me to behave. I thought, “Well this matters. I can give myself to this.” What I also heard is that the church is to be a bold place. God’s love does bold things and so the church is to be doing bold things. Great things.

As a teenager, when I wasn’t thinking about God, which was most of the time, I was usually thinking about achievement. I was very driven. Looking back, I realize I was largely driven by fear. I was afraid the world was going to leave me behind if I didn’t get the best grades and a decent score on my ACT. I was always excited when I achieved something in music or sports, but then I quickly became afraid again that in the future I wouldn’t measure up to what I had done in the past. I was terrified by failure because deep down I felt like I was worth more when I achieved more. I didn’t trust the message of my belovedness that came through my baptism.

Baptism tells us that God loves us when we succeed and God loves us when we fail. We don’t need to earn our worth, we are valuable already. Trusting this love will also drive us, but in a different way. Trusting this love will drive us to follow our passions rather than the crowd. To us, then we will follow our passions rather than following the crowd. We will choose our activities and pursuits because we love them, because we can’t not do them, not because it is a path to achievement. We will trust that we all have amazing gifts to share and we will throw ourselves into discovering them, developing them, and giving them to the world. Trusting God’s love will call us to do great things, but we will do them not to convince ourselves we’re worth something, but to make the lives of others better; to make the world a better place.

When I’m honest I admit that fear still drives me, it always will I’m sure. But more and more I think I’m driven by love.

One of the last sermons Martin Luther King Jr. delivered was titled, “The Drum Major Instinct.” The focus passage is the story of the disciples arguing about who is the greatest. King describes Jesus’ response this way. He says, “You expect Jesus to say, ‘you are selfish, you are out of place.’” But Jesus says something quite different. “Oh, I see you want to be great. You want to be important. You want to

be significant. Well you ought to be. If you're going to be my disciple, you must be." But he reordered priorities, and he said, "Yes, don't give up this instinct. It's a good instinct if you use it right. Keep feeling the need for being important. Keep feeling the need for being first. But I want you to be first in love. I want you to be first in moral excellence. I want you to be first in generosity. That is what I want you to do."

When those first disciples do such amazing healing things, they let go of their fears, trust their belovedness and they allow that love to drive them and flow through them. Disciples today are invited to do the same. We are to let go of our fears, trust that we too are beloved – even in our glorious imperfections, allow God's love to fill us, and then flow through us, to drive us. In an increasingly cold and cruel world, we will care, for the sick, for the heartbroken, for those who live in poverty, and for the planet on which we all depend. In a world that still thirsts for justice, we will be living water. We will be living water through our actions, and also by stubbornly telling the truth that injustice is never necessary, no matter what the powers say. God's love can always give birth to something new and we are called to be a part of it. We will provide hope with our actions and with our words as we invite others to be a part of what God is doing too. We give thanks for this way of life, and ask that we will always be open to the ways the Spirit will send us. Amen.