

**Mark 6:1-13**

<sup>1</sup>[Jesus] came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. <sup>2</sup>On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! <sup>3</sup>Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” <sup>5</sup>And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup>And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup>He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup>He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup>but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup>He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup>They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

In the congregation that I served before coming to CRLC, the Vacation Bible School Director came to me and said, in preparation for making the decorations and scenery around the Vacation Bible School theme this year, they were going to put railroad tracks down the hall from the entrance into the sanctuary. Not real tracks, of course, but they would use the black electrical tape for it. They had tested it on the carpet, and it would come up the easiest without causing any damage. So, we had our well attended and great themed Vacation Bible School. All went well until it was time to remove the electrical tape from the carpet. Apparently in their testing, they did not leave it on for an entire week and have it stomped on for a few hours every day. What happened was it left dark marks everywhere the tape had been. So even after all the tape was removed when you entered our church, all one had to do was follow the railroad tracks and it led you right into the sanctuary. Two professional cleanings later, those railroad tracks were still visible; and as far as I know you might be able to see them even yet today if they have not replaced the carpeting yet. I do not know, though they were starting to fade over time.

It's interesting how we use all the different types of tape in our world, for other things than what it was designed for - like electrical tape, for railroad tracks instead of electrical wiring and so forth.

Today, as we hear in the Gospel about Jesus's frustration of sharing the Gospel in his hometown, as well as the sending out of the two disciples two by two, to teach and share about the inbreaking of the kingdom, I would like to play with the metaphor of all the different types of tape that we have, when we think what it is we bring to our faith and how we are called to share our faith with others. For example, when we think about witnessing our faith with those we come in contact with, are you perhaps

like transparent tape? How much of our lives, in what we do is transparent to those around us, to our family, to our coworkers, to our friends and neighbors that is readily open about our faith and discipleship in God?

Or are we more like packing tape? We bring a lot of baggage with us. We carry a lot of 'extras' when it comes to our faith life. We have certain preconceived notions of how something should be, and we then see that faith experience, only through our own lens, of good or even bad experiences, and that is the baggage, that is the packing, we bring to a certain situation that impacts how we share and live the faith. In other words, we include extra stuff about the faith, that maybe is not in line with the Gospel.

Or maybe we are more like masking tape? Do we live in secret? How much of our lives do we try to hide from others and keep concealed about the things we do, the things we believe, even our very faith, the things we do not want others to see? How much of our telling of our faith story would we rather keep unknown?

Or what about the blue painters' tape that even marks social distancing in our sanctuary. How much of our sharing of the faith, is like painters' tape, that is used to establish clear lines, nothing can be blurry, or nothing can bleed through. We want clear and defined edge marks in our faith?

Or perhaps when it comes to sharing the faith, are we sometimes like duct tape? Now perhaps that example can have a twofold meaning that is both negative and positive about communicating our religious beliefs. Positive in that we can almost always use it for everything, meaning that we can make it fit somehow. But on the other hand, maybe it is

misused as well, having a duct tape type of evangelism with our circles of encounters tries to force it in an unfitting way.

Today, in the Gospel of Mark, we hear about a practice in growing the faith that has often been used in church history, a method that many have tried to model. Jesus sends out the disciples in pairs to go and relate to others with his message. It is something that I think, if at the conclusion of today's, we divided everyone up and told them to leave here and pick a neighborhood and start going door to door. It would be intimidating and terrifying. This may have been the point where if I was following Jesus back then, I might have suddenly remembered that I had something to do back at home. Or that yes, I need to definitely wear a mask, and an even bigger one. Now, of course, the culture from the time of Jesus to 2021 here today is radically different. To send folks out, even in pairs, into our neighborhoods today would even be a safety risk with how we have developed as our culture and our approach to people we do not know. While, I have some very stark differences with Mormons and Jehovah witnesses, I do at least admire their willingness to go out and share their faith. However, I have to also be honest and say, if I know it is Jehovah Witness or Mormons at my door, I probably am not going to open it, unless of course, my wife is home and she starts talking!

What is it, besides all the cultural and societal shifts that certainly are a factor, but what is it about sharing the faith of others, that makes it so difficult? Is it because we think of televangelists and what the media has reflected how people who have misused and abused the faith? Is it struggling with the great diversities of faith in our world? And so, due to all these things to share about Jesus becomes a fearful flag for us? What makes us uncomfortable about it? What, in your faith journey makes you

uncomfortable about it all? What makes you uncomfortable, in your faith? Is it fear of rejection? Jesus in his instructions to the disciples, says that when they experience rejection, for them to shake the dust from their feet as a testimony against them; which was a very strong cultural symbol in those times, which is equivalent in our culture today, to put it crassly, to taking a certain appendix on our hand and elevating in it. Singularity. It had the same sort of the cultural aspect of putting another down and showing your dissatisfaction.

There other things besides rejection that makes it difficult to share the faith. Perhaps because it's so deeply personal, maybe because it's full of tension between certainty and doubt, maybe it's because we know that we too often struggle with our faith, that we are apprehensive of coming off as if we have it all together, and we don't want to be hypocritical, or labeled, or made fun of - and once again rejected. We all have concentric circles of comfort levels of telling and sharing what is so important to our core of life, and this includes our faith lives, our spirituality.

Going back to the tape analogy again, sharing our faith is a sticky business, but rather we realize it or not, how we are, how we act, how we speak everyday, is already a witness about our beliefs, about our faith. We cannot escape demonstrating who we are and what we believe by our daily choices, movements, deeds and words. We can each ask ourselves what is that message I am portraying in the living of my life about God, about religion, about faith, about spirituality in my life? How are we embodying acceptance, forgiveness, openness, relationship and God's embracing and amazing grace in what we do? Amen.