

**Blessed, Broken and Shared:
A Reflection on Mark Chapter 6 by Kate Doherty**

Many years ago I was on a road trip with a friend and one afternoon we stopped for lunch in a little town. As we were walking around looking for a place to eat a man attempted to stop us to talk. He had a big back pack and was dressed very bohemian. We tried to brush him off and avoid eye contact unsure what this strange man wanted from us. As we tried to brush past him he said “Excuse me, Could you help me out and spare me a few bucks to help me buy lunch?” we coldly told him “no we couldn’t.” We found a little sandwich shop and after ordering we sat outside to enjoy our lunch it was then we saw the same man who had tried to stop us with another guy walking into the shop. I overheard him say “Thank you so much for buying me lunch, I am a researcher and I am writing a book about generosity, I have been trying to travel across the country on nothing but people’s generosity.” When we heard this my friend and I laughed and wondered if we would show up in the book as prime examples of the very ungenerous people of the world. I found myself wishing we hadn’t brushed this man off so quickly and we could hear more about his experiences. In the Gospel today we hear of Jesus instructing his disciples to take a similar leap of faith doing their own work to spread the Good News. Jesus wants his disciples to travel on nothing but the generosity of people and the truth of their message.

It is easy to read Jesus instructions to his disciples and take them as something for them, these special friends of Jesus who he had a higher expectation for, then well, say us for example. I think that is a mistake, we are Jesus’s disciples today and I think we should take seriously the instruction and training he provided for his followers taking to heart the lessons for ourselves.

So let’s look at what Jesus asks of his followers to do and think about what it could look like in our own life.

1) First, He sent them off in pairs. Cultivating Community is undeniably an important part of Jesus message and mission. Jesus doesn’t send the disciples to face their work alone. I think sharing our lives with each other and fostering community is an important way we can practice that today. Now a day when we talk about sharing our lives the first think that comes to mind is social media, despite the fact that there are really great ways to connect and share your life using these powerful resources. In many ways they have degraded the word share. What we do on social media is showcase not share and as we attempt to foster genuine community we need to be aware of when we truly are sharing our lives and when we are showcasing them.

2) The second thing Jesus does is he instructs the disciples to go out under prepared, taking nothing for the journey, no food, no sack, no money, not even a second tunic. The boy scouts would not agree with Jesus advice here. I can remember my Mom and I fighting if I refused to take a Jacket with me before leaving the house, and would berate me about how I better not come crying to her if I got cold later. As a society we value preparedness. Being prepared, is

about being independent, resilient and not needing to count on anyone for anything. Intentionally setting out without the things you will need means you will have to rely on the generosity of strangers, it means you will have to ask for help. It means you will have to trust in God to take care of you. This is a brilliant exercise that Jesus uses, not only does it force the disciples to engage with way more people giving them more opportunity to spread the Good News, it also forces them to confront their own perception of what they need versus what they want, and puts them in immediate solidarity with those who are poor. Of course this doesn't mean we should stop being prepared, but I think it does mean we should value simplicity, know when to ask for help, be in solidarity with the poor, worry less and trust God more

3) Finally, Jesus tells them to stay where they are welcome and not waste time trying to convert those who are closed off. Jesus knows that fighting over this stuff is a waste of breath. I use to question this image of the disciples simply shaking the dust off their feet at those unwilling to listen. It seemed like affront to compassionate dialogue and listening to one's enemy. It made them seem as if they didn't care about the people who needed the message the most. Now a day I see this differently. I see the wisdom in not trying to change minds, and instead simply nurturing the places where the seeds of truth can take root and bear fruit. In all my years I have never seen an argument, debate or person pushing their agenda change someone's mind, or transform a heart. However, countless times I have seen people be changed by a relationship with someone different than them, transformed by an experience, or affected by the work of people doing something kind and generous. This is what the "new evangelization" is all about and what the Pope is trying to harken us back to. Like, Father Paulson preached last week quoting Gandhi we have to be the change, we want to see in the world.

I started with a story about a missed opportunity for connection I want to close today with a success story. I have been participating for the past 23 week in a Just Faith course with 5 other women here in the parish. Next week we complete our 24 week Journey. In this course we have been learning to cultivate what Jack Jezreel names as the "6 essential ingredients to culturing peace", which are Relationships with Those at Risk; Justice Education; Simpler Lifestyles; Prayer; Commitment to Nonviolence; and Community. I would say these six steps are the same lessons Jesus is hoping to give his disciples with this experience he sets them up for in the scripture today. A few weeks ago our group brainstormed several specific ways to do each of these things. Then we were each supposed to pick one and practice it for 6 weeks.

One night our group was checking in with how our practice was going and one member who had committed to speaking to homeless people in order to cultivate relationships with those at risk shared this wonderful story. She had been in line at the post office and there was a homeless man in line who was clearly struggling. He was unkempt, clearly injured, and occasionally bursting into crying fits. This is a scene that would make anyone uncomfortable, but knowing she had made a commitment to talk to the homeless more, my group member felt more torn about just ignoring him. He was slightly in front of her in line, and so left before her, when she left the post office she decided to try and find him and at least offer him a few bucks to get food or water.

Since he was injured he hadn't walked far so she caught up with him at a bus stop across the street and offered him the money. He was shocked and wanted to know why she would do that, and she shrugged it off saying that maybe he needed it. They began to talk, and he told her a lot of his story and that he was headed down to a certain street corner where he and a few other homeless friends hung out. So she decided to offer him a ride. She discreetly covered her back seat with some reusable shopping bags, as the man was obviously soiled, and they talked more as they drove. He then asked her "why are you doing this?" So she said "If you really want to know, I meet with some ladies at my church, and I made a promise to try and talk to more people in your situation." He was delighted by this and told her "Well you go back and you tell those church ladies that you did good, make sure you tell them about me." With tears in her eyes my group member said to us in that moment we were the same and I saw Jesus in him. When she finished her story another group member commented that she also had been Jesus to that man, and added that this was a lived experience of our Mass blessed, broken and shared.

I will close with a question that this just faith course will ask of our group in its closing meeting. Even Jesus sent us out in twos and threes. Who will you invite to walk this journey with you?