

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 26,2025
Psalm 119:97-104; Matthew 10:1-16

"Preach As You Go"

Even though Jesus had all the insight and wisdom of God available to him, he still chose some pretty odd people to be his disciples. It's amazing how average and inexperienced they were. Not a one of them was a preacher, which was probably a good thing. None of them were particularly religious. They were small town people who had never traveled much beyond their home region. Four of the twelve were fishermen, but beyond that they shared almost nothing in common. They were not particularly well educated. And one of them, a tax collector named Matthew, was detested by his community.

I wouldn't say that Jesus went out of his way to choose mediocre men, but intellect and expertise were obviously not high on the list of qualities he was seeking. In fact, the disciples were quite ill-suited for establishing the most prolific faith in the history of the world, and yet we can't argue with the results. Those twelve disciples changed the course of history. So, the next time we offer up our excuses for not following Jesus as closely as we ought, just remember how average, and even substandard, were the first disciples.

We may not be qualified, but by the grace of God we are authorized to be His disciples. Perhaps God sees in us more potential than we see in ourselves. Perhaps God thinks that what needs doing in the world requires some people who have a little worldly experience. God can take experiences we have had at work, at school, at home, and at raising a family, and use those experiences to help others.

For instance, at the time of my call, I was not qualified to be called into pastoral ministry. I was nineteen years old and had flunked out of the University of Texas. I wasn't especially spiritual or religious; I didn't know much about the Bible and I really hadn't attended church since I was confirmed at age 13. In fact, I was pretty rebellious and disdainful of the "establishment." Obviously, God saw something in me that even I didn't see that would make me a useful disciple.

What I've learned through the years is that what makes good disciples is not how "good" we are, but how committed we are to the grace, love and justice of Jesus Christ. What makes my ministry effective is not my qualifications, credentials, degrees, and certifications, although I've worked hard to earn those. What makes my ministry effective is my willingness

to be vulnerable and compassionate. My failures and my willingness to talk about them have generated more conversations about faith and faithfulness than my successes.

I believe that God chose me to be a minister because I'm normal (well, maybe not normal, but at least average). Jesus chooses ordinary people to do extraordinary things to demonstrate how extraordinary God is.

God can and regularly does all sorts of extraordinary things with all sorts of ordinary people, simply because they depend on him. What Jesus really looks for in a disciple is not someone who is super-spiritual or a Bible scholar, but someone who is willing to be real and faithful. Real, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ are in short supply and high demand these days. Jesus needs more people who are willing to be themselves for Him. In being authentic disciples, we open ourselves and our church to the transformational power of Jesus Christ.

This is a great time in the life of our church to open ourselves to the kind of transformation to which God is calling us. I want you to try an experiment. Fold your hands together, interlocking your fingers. Look at your neighbor's folded hands. Are they folded the same way? Now change the position of your fingers by shifting the fingers on one hand up one finger. It doesn't feel comfortable, does it? But is it wrong? No. Neither way is right or wrong. One way simply feels more comfortable than the other.

It's the same with change in our lives or in the life of the church. Change usually feels uncomfortable, even if it is well-intended. The "old way" is no more right than the "old way" of interlocking our fingers. It is simply more comfortable. We have to get beyond the notion that comfortable and familiar are right. Jesus called us to comfort others not be comfortable ourselves.

This is the time to believe that God has a grand vision for our church. God is up to something at Providence right now. Believe this. Our problem in believing that is that we've got too limited a vision of what our church can be and do. We need to trust that God has some awesome things in store for this congregation as a part of the body of Jesus Christ.

For instance, I believe God purposely led Tamil Church to us to expand our vision of what the church can be and do. We have an opportunity to be more than simply a host for believers who originally come from the Tamil region of India. We need to look for opportunities to share in ministry together.

We Presbyterians have rested on our.... laurels for too long, assuming that folks will come to us because we are such nice people. We have equated a personal faith with a private faith. Jesus does call us into a personal faith with him, but that is never a private faith. Jesus intends us to share that faith - that joy - with others. In short, we have to be

willing for God to transform our limited vision into an unlimited vision of what God can and will do with and through us.

When Jesus sent the twelve disciples out on their first mission, healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and casting out demons, he instructed them “preach as you go” In other words, “let your life be your sermon.”

Most of us had a favorite teacher in school. What do you most remember about your favorite teacher - what they taught you or how they behaved? I don't remember much of what my teachers taught me, but I do remember how they acted toward me. They taught me more by what they did than by what they said. The same is true for us as disciples of Jesus Christ. We teach others more about our faith in Jesus Christ by what we do than by what we say. Which may be a scary thought for some of us.

I find it very interesting that Halloween decorations now rival Christmas decorations. A day which is devoted to good natured fun and scary images captures the discrepancy between the real world and a mythical world. Sometimes it's hard to know which is more scary. The world is a very scary place right now. What our neighbors need is someone who can unmask the scary things and reveal them for what they are. Jesus, working through us, offers solid faith to counteract scary reality. As followers of Jesus Christ we need to begin acting like people of faith instead of people of fear.

We need to follow Jesus' example and preach as we go. As we live our lives, we preach. As we do our jobs, we preach. As we interact with colleagues, we preach. As we go to school, we preach. As we go to movies or concerts, we preach. As we shop for groceries or pump gas, we preach. As we drive.....we preach. As we attend session and committee meetings, we preach. As we visit patients, we preach. As we preach, we preach. In everything we do and everywhere we go, we preach.

The question is: what are we preaching? If we are preaching hope, love, grace, mercy, and justice, then we are preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. We don't have a choice of whether we preach. We only have a choice of what we preach. Preach as you go about your daily lives and God will use you in ways you cannot even imagine.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen