

## **“Sent, Dust, Not Dis” by Reverend Sherwyn Benjamin**

**July 4, 2021**

### **Mark 6:7-13**

*And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged 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 put on two tunics. And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. (Mark 6:7-13)*

Happy Fourth of July, a day of celebration. People will gather and enjoy various kinds of celebrations and traditions that usually end with a great fireworks display. We celebrate the adoption of the document that declare that men were created equally and endowed by the One who created them with rights that cannot be taken or given up— to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

As I was considering the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday, its celebrations, and that it falls on Sunday, I considered what the preacher would say to the people who would gather in this day for worship. Then I recalled and reflected. For the God who we believe created the cosmos and everything therein, those sentiments expressed in the Declaration of Independence are true and have been true since the foundation of the world. So, for us who worship that God and follow the Christ, who came that we would have life in abundance and to set us all free, we understand those words to be part of

the activity of God's love and that they permeate our faith life. We understand these truths, not only to be self-evident, but to be something bigger than self, self-interest, dominance, power, security, and even country. God's intention for equality and liberation for humanity is a global and even cosmic reality.

God's intent has always been for all of humanity to have access to all that creation has for them and be unencumbered to live freely and be their full self. I believe that God has continuously been at work throughout creation's existence and history to bring all of us into this reality. God has never stopped and has engaged humanity over and over to return us to this reality again. This is God's desire for creation and has been God's mission, which includes God's loving action manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I also believe and want to emphasize for us today that God's works continue through us. That is the purpose for which God redeemed us, because of God's unfailing love and to be God's instruments of grace and transformation in the world.

I couldn't help but pause and think that a little after four decades after our Independence was declared, this church (Damascus United Methodist) was established in 1822. God sends us into the world to continue the work of proclaiming hope, being the standard bearer of love, and bringing transformation to the world. This is why we must always keep in mind that we are sent. This is Jesus' teaching and preparation for disciples in the Gospel reading that read this morning.

First, we must remember that we do not do anything under our own power. Notice in Mark 6:7 that Jesus sent out the disciple after giving them authority. So, we do not go under our own authority! On the one hand, we

should not go with our limited power because we will not always be received. More importantly, we do not do this work in our own power because one of the things that we have and are still struggling to figure out is carrying out God's mission according to God's agenda.

That means, secondly, that we should consider ourselves guests of those to whom we are sent. There are many instances when history shows us where the church has in some ways occupied places in the name of evangelism and under the guise of spreading Christianity, while pushing a larger goal that may not be in the best interest of their constituents. Too often churches view themselves as the entity that the people must come to and not as guests asking how they can be in ministry with the people to whom they are sent.

Wherever we gather for the purpose of learning, growing, and worship, we also gather as a mission site. God has granted us grace to connect with others and establish relationships with God, learn, grow, and experience God's grace through the many means of grace that leads to transformation. We are also sent there, commissioned, and empowered to lead others to transformation and we do this with humility and love.

Think about it this way. Everything we do here—Sunday school to singing in the choir, from Earth stewards to Neema Kenyan and between cultures, from LOA advocating for justice and equality to the blessing of the Harwood house in the community—for almost 200 years God has sent the people of DUMC to be in community and ministry with the people of Damascus, even if and especially as the community around us evolves.

But we acknowledge that I believe Jesus tells us through the disciples that it is not easy work and everyone will not receive you. But it is relational and persistent work. Jesus told the disciples to shake off the dust as a testimony against those who would not listen to them or receive them.

(Mark 6:11) I think that is what he was demonstrating to them in the events in verses 1 thru 6. But I don't believe that he meant to dismiss, disregard, or discount them. Remember, it is not under our own power that we go out and do this work. Our focus must be to carry on the work of healing and lifting up others. While we are at work, the Holy Spirit is working through us. This scripture has become like many that we use to sort of excommunicate people, especially in a time when so many things divide us. I don't believe what Jesus was saying. I believe that he was saying keep moving and continue to work the mission.

So, as we celebrate this 4<sup>th</sup> of July, a day when we mysteriously set aside the things that distance us from each other to celebrate freedom and liberty, remember that God has sent us into the world to continue the work of liberating all of humanity. Remember that God has sent us to bridge builders. Remember to celebrate God's great creation as God continues to work for human liberty.