

Whaddya Call It?
February 11, 2018
Mark 3:7-19, II Peter 1:16-18
The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights
Pastor Dave Carver

To hear this sermon as preached in worship, please visit
<https://castyournet.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/sermon02-11-18.mp3>

Does what you call something affect what it really is? Do job titles matter? These are the things that I think about when you leave me alone for too long.

For instance, did you know that the BAI beverage corporation has a CFO – “Chief Flavor Officer”, and that position is held, I kid you not, by musician Justin Timberlake. Microsoft employs someone with the title of “Galactic Viceroy of Research Excellence”. Google pays someone to be their “In-House Philosopher”, and a man named Richard Scheuerman has been featured on the Food Network as a “Shredded Cheese Authority”. Time Magazine recently hired a “Bacon Critic” and Mr. Bernie Paton of Oakland, CA, is a “Bear Biologist and Paper Folder”.



As I thought about that, I remembered the 1995 film *The Englishman Who Went Up A Hill But Came Down a Mountain*. That tells the mostly true story of Taff’s Well, a village near the border between England and Wales. They’d billed themselves as “the first mountain inside Wales”, and had a hospitality industry that catered to climbers from Britain. In 1910, a team of cartographers visited the town and discovered that their peak, *Ffynnon Garw*, is only 986 feet above sea level and therefore must be termed a “hill” and not a

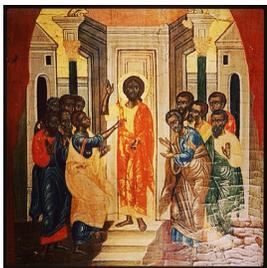


“mountain”. Enraged, and afraid of losing their tourist attraction, the locals conspire to strand the map-makers in the town until they can build a pile of rocks at the top of the hill. The scientists re-measure, and determine that the highest part of the structure is actually 1002 feet and therefore, officially, the first mountain

inside Wales.

That matters because in today's Gospel reading, Mark throws around a lot of labels and job titles, and I think that they have an implication for our lives today.

In Mark 3:9, we see that Jesus counts on a group of people known as "disciples" to get things done. The Greek word that we find there, *mathétés*, is used to describe one who is a "learner" or a "follower". When Latin became the official language of the church, *mathétés* became *discipulus*, from the root word *disco*, meaning "to learn". It also spawned one of the most awesome band names of the 1980's: the Disco Disciples.



We read of disciples who listen, serve, worship, and generally clear the way for Jesus to do a lot of stuff. Like most Rabbis, Jesus relied on his disciples for a lot of things. In the Gospels, disciples prepare boats, ask fantastic set-up questions, bring friends, fix dinner, and (as we've already seen with Levi) throw amazing parties. We like the disciples, Jesus likes the disciples, and everyone agrees that Jesus' ministry was really strengthened by the team of disciples that he gathered around him.

Because these folks were important to Jesus and to the world around him, we know some of them. So let me ask you, how many disciples did Jesus have? Some people might say 12; Luke mentions a group of either 70 or 72, and later in Acts he says that by that time the group numbered about 120. It seems that the number of disciples was fluid, and increased as Jesus' ministry matured.

The role of disciple is crucial throughout the history of the church and even today, of course. In fact, if you look at the Annual Report of the congregation, you'll find that this church has

not one, but two groups of people who are officially termed “Discipleship Teams”. We need those who are committed to creating conditions whereby people can become hearers and listeners and learners and doers so that the way is cleared for Jesus’ message to get through. Disciples take care of kids in the church nursery and set up chairs, make copies, and track administrative data. The body of Christ, no less today than two thousand years ago, would be nowhere without faithful disciples.



The next group that Jesus encounters are termed “the unclean spirits”. Whereas most of the people around Jesus either have no clue who he is, or (like the disciples) are just beginning to get an idea about this, the unclean spirits are constantly shouting the truth: Jesus is the Son of God; they know Jesus to be the Holy One. Yet as soon as these spirits begin to acknowledge the truth about who Jesus is, he shuts them up and forbids them from speaking.

Think about that for a moment – he’s constantly gathering followers around him, trying to teach them, helping them to see something of who he is...and much of the time, they don’t get it. Yet as soon as he walks into the room, unclean spirits recognize him for who he is and announce it – and they are told to remain silent.

It seems to me that the implication here is that you don’t get to talk *about* Jesus until you show that you have listened *to* Jesus and been shaped by him. These spirits know the truth – but they don’t really know Jesus.

Similarly, our world today is filled with those who claim to speak for, or at least about, Jesus but who seem to be ignorant of what he really was. There are so-called authorities who are happy to yell out that Jesus wants you to be rich, happy, thin, and young. Spirits cry out that Jesus prefers a particular system of

government or a political party. We're told by "leading teachers" that Jesus wants you to protect yourself and your family from "those people" at all costs. Worst of all are the voices who cry out that Jesus hates the gays, the foreigners, those on the left or those on the right.

Before you invest any of your time and energy listening to these people, ask yourself, "Is that person actually spending time with Jesus? Does he or she look, or act, or think, like Jesus would?" When someone claims to tell me who Jesus would hate, or bomb, or ostracize, or destroy... I have to question the spirit that is driving that discussion, and often times it's hard to believe that it is indeed a spirit of the Christ behind those sentiments.



The third group of folks with whom Jesus spends time in our Gospel reading for today are called apostles, from the Greek word *apostolos*. That word refers to a messenger, an ambassador, or a delegate: one who has been commissioned to convey a particular message or accomplish a specific task.

Let's play a game that we've already played once this morning: how many apostles did Jesus have?

I know, the "gimme" answer seems to be twelve, because that's what is listed here. But later on, after Judas abandons his post, the eleven believe that Matthias is called to join their number. Moreover, the New Testament refers to Barnabas, Paul, Andronicus, Junia (who happened to be a woman, by the way!), Timothy, Silas, and Apollos as *apostolos*.

Like disciples, the apostles were incredibly important to Jesus and to the later church. We should note that in today's reading, all the apostles are disciples, but not all disciples are apostles.

The apostles are called to be "with" Jesus. They are given

authority to cast out those unclean spirits and demons and to proclaim the message of Christ. Throughout the New Testament, the Apostles are taking trips on Jesus' behalf; they are preaching and healing and generally speaking for Jesus (which sets them apart from both the unclean spirits and the disciples). In reflecting on this, Peter wrote to his friends, essentially, "Look, it's not like we had a choice or anything: we *saw it* with our own eyes. You can't make this stuff up! Jesus was the real deal, and we were compelled to share it with you all."

So what does all of that mean in our context?

Here's a clue: when the language of the church transitioned from Greek to Latin, the Greek *apostolos* was sometimes simply shifted to the Latin *apostolo*; however, the preferred term was often the Latin word *missio*. As in "mission", or, in this context, "missionary".

How many of you here today are anticipating being a part of a Mission Trip this week? Can you believe it? We have seventeen adults who have some level of connection with this congregation who are preparing to leave next Sunday morning for Houston, Texas. When we get to the Pittsburgh Airport, we'll be joined by another dozen from the John McMillan church in Bethel Park. Almost 30 people who are taking time away from their so-called "normal" lives in order to dwell with each other and the folks on the Gulf coast of Texas who have suffered through the horror of Hurricane Harvey.

And we are calling this a "Mission Trip". Why? Because we believe that framing walls and cleaning out muck and removing moldy drywall and laying new sewage lines and helping people sift through generations of family mementos and memories are all a part of demonstrating and proclaiming the



reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ. We use that terminology because we have gathered in this place and heard the call of Jesus and sought to follow – that is, we have become disciples; and now we understand that we are being given an opportunity to share in the purposes of God in the context of the Texas Gulf coast, and therefore we are sent as *apostolos*. The labels matter. If this is indeed a *mission* trip – and I am convinced that it is – then that makes the 29 of us *missionaries*, right? We are called to become that which we are sent to accomplish.

So, that takes care of a couple dozen of us... is that what we're here to talk about? 29 people planning a mission trip this week? What about the rest of us? What are you planning to do?

Let me ask you this:

Is the healing power of Jesus Christ needed on the campus over at CCAC this week?

Are there people with whom you work who need to hear a word of grace, encouragement, or hope?

Would the scene at the grocery store, your family's dinner table, a blind date, or a board meeting be improved by the presence, spirit, power, and love of Jesus of Nazareth?

In short, would our world be better if the stuff that we talked about while we're in this room somehow managed to find its way out there? Would the lives of our neighbors be blessed if some of the life and ministry and teaching and love and hope and justice of Jesus was lived and shared and conveyed into the arenas in which those neighbors live and work and play?

Yeah, yeah, yeah... now that you mention it, Pastor, it would. But how is it going to get there? How?

If only there were people in this room today who were willing and able to hear from Jesus; someone who wanted to learn from

him and follow him around as he does such amazing things in our world... if only there were people like that who would also be liable to show up on campus or at work or in relationships with neighbors and family later this week. But where could we *possibly* find people who are both *here*, with Jesus as followers, and *out there* in the world that he loves?

You might have come in here willing to be a disciple. And that's great. It's a fine job title. Yet I hope and pray that you will find in you a hunger to become an apostle. Next week a fraction of us will be going to Texas. My deep prayer is that *each of us* would recognize that we are being sent on a mission. Oh, that *all of our trips* would be mission trips.

Thanks be to God, they can be – because that is who you are.

Hear our prayer, O Lord.

Amen.