

**Mark 6:7-13**

Modern-Day Church Growth teachers would say that this text is a recipe for failure. We know this because Jesus' instructions to His disciples for carrying out mission work are missing the most important part—according to how mission work is done today. Jesus forgets to give His disciples a number...a number to shoot for. Now certainly 100 million may be too high, but shouldn't He have suggested that they make it their goal to reach 1,000 people? Or even 10,000? What good is a mission effort without some sort of goal in mind? Six teams of two each—surely they should have made it their goal to gain two or three hundred converts to the faith from each team, and overall to record 10,000 “critical events” using today's language?

Or perhaps we're missing something here. Perhaps Jesus doesn't give His disciples a number to shoot for, for a reason. Perhaps Jesus doesn't want His disciples to worry about the results but to be concerned only that their focus is on proclaiming the Word of God.

Positive results are wonderful! What a joyful thing it is when a sinner is brought to Christ. We're told that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents. This means that the day you were baptized there was much celebrating in heaven. And daily when you and I return to our baptism, confessing to God that we have sinned, believing His gracious word of pardon to us in Christ, again there is much rejoicing in heaven.

If we want to shoot for a number in doing mission work; if we want the Church to focus on a particular number as it carries out the task of evangelism, that number should be “one.” And who is that “one?” It's Christ! He's the One we want to focus on. It's all about Jesus—preaching Christ to people...proclaiming His sufferings, death, and resurrection...preaching “repentance for forgiveness of sins” in His name...and trusting His promise that as His Gospel is proclaimed to the nations, the Holy Spirit will work mightily in the hearts and lives of people when and where He pleases.

Now as you know I just returned from a mission trip to Africa, and I have great joy in telling you that the Holy Spirit is working powerfully over there. And not because our focus is on numbers, but because Jesus Christ is being proclaimed.

I suppose that I did everything completely wrong in my journey according to our text. Jesus instructed His disciples to take nothing for their journey—no bag, no bread, no money in their belt. And here I go packing a whole suitcase of food, and buying an oversized belt at Wal-Mart for the express purpose of stuffing my money in it. And my only defense is to point out that these particular instructions in Mark 6 were prescribed for the disciples then—for that trip—and not for the Church of all time. But the message which they preached is for all times and all places. They preached repentance—in the wide sense—that people confess their sins and believe the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

And that, and only that had to be my focus in Sudan—not worrying whether the pastors and students in my class were growing in their faith and in their zeal to bring Christ to their people, but trusting what God commands: that preaching and teaching Jesus Christ is the sum and substance of the work of the Kingdom.

And dear people of Christ Lutheran Congregation in Augusta, it is also with great joy that I bring you a word of greeting in Christ from the Lutherans in Sudan. And that they thank you from the very bottom of their hearts for allowing your pastor to be taken from you for a few weeks and spend that time with them. Not that I am anything. The one number that counts is Christ. And that's why they thank you, for I was privileged to be able, by God's grace, to bring them the same Jesus Christ who in Holy Baptism has called you to be His Christians.

It's all about Jesus. He's the One who sent out His disciples to preach. He is the content of their preaching. And anyone who listened to their message and believed the good news, did so only because the Spirit of Christ was at work within them. Even those who did not believe, who did not listen to the message proclaimed would, on the Day of Judgment, have to stand before that same Christ and hear His words of rejection.

No Christian and no Christian preacher desires this fate for anyone. There is no greater tragedy, ever, than for a sinner for whom Christ died to ignore, to reject the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus loves these lost souls just as much as He loves you. And so we see Him instructing His disciples, "If any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

This was not done in anger but in great sadness. It was a sign to these stubborn people that as they have not welcomed the message of Christ, neither will Christ welcome them into heaven. "Shake off the dust at them," says Jesus. This is a clear word of warning. It is as if to say, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." "You will not be able to stand on the Day of Judgment for you are nothing but dust. You did not create yourself, rather, your loving God created you from the dust, but because you reject His salvation for you, your body of dust will perish forever."

Those are not nice words to hear. That sign of warning—of shaking off the dust at them was not a nice thing to see. But it was done in love. The love of a Savior's broken heart yearning for sinners who refuse to be loved.

The same love is shown today when Christian Pastors along with their Elders admonish their members who refuse the Savior's love. The disciples certainly had no joy at all in shaking off the dust of their feet at those who refused to listen to them. And we have no joy whatsoever today when we write and speak words of warning to those who are ignoring God's salvation.

If you have ever received such a warning, understand that it was done out of love. It is much easier to leave erring members alone. But to love them is to shake off the dust at them—to give them God's clear word of warning. And that warning is for all of us. For who among us has never rejected God! Who among us has never refused His will and gone our own selfish way! "Remember, therefore, that you are dust."

But remember, also, that it's all about Jesus. He who knew no sin became sin for you. He put your dust upon Himself becoming Man to take your place under the Law. He suffered in your stead. He was accused in your place. He died for you. He was swallowed up by the dust of death in order to rise from death and give you life. He who did all this for you has baptized you giving you there that new life in Him. He knows you are dust and so He

welcomes you to His Table to receive His body and blood, risen and glorified, as a sure sign to you that you will live with Him forever.

Your Savior forgives you. He does not hold any grudges against you for the many times you refuse to love Him. But you are completely forgiven. Your path through life may be covered with the dust of many sins—do not be afraid—He has declared you clean in your baptism. Everything about you and in you is clean.

You and I may be dust, but hear His good news for you: Remember that you are Christ's, and to Christ you shall return. You will stand on the Day of Judgment, not because you stand upon your own goodness, but because Jesus stands with you. And He will not let you perish. He who gave Himself for you on the cross promises, in the waters of your baptism, to never leave you nor forsake you. It's all about Jesus. Not me for Him, but Him for you.

What a privilege to stand here today and give you this good news—the same message preached by the Twelve; the same message preached and taught in Sudan; the message which you, by the power and working of God, believe, and because you believe, you have life forever in Jesus Christ. Amen.