

BIBLICAL RESOURCES



Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 85 (84); Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:6b-13

Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two

Mark 6:6b *Then he went about among the villages teaching.* 7 Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” 12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.



INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The appointment of the Twelve and their sending out are found in Mark 3:13-19, Matthew 10:1-4 and Luke 12:12-16; Matthew 10:1-16; Luke 9:1-6 and here in Mark 6:7-13. (Luke alone has the special sending of seventy-two in 10:1-16.) It looks in all cases that the later experience of the mission has had an influence on the details of the telling. This “adjustment” was a way of making the instructions of Jesus relevant in later, unforeseen circumstances. In this way the evangelist can speak at two levels: (i) the pre-Easter sending of the apostles and (ii) the post-Easter context of the community for which he wrote. In Mark, this passage opens a new section the

Gospel which will run from Mark 6:6b to 8:21.

KIND OF WRITING

This passage really begins in v. 6b, one of the more brief summaries of Jesus’ activities in Mark. On foot of the summary, Mark introduces the third narrative of call and commission. At the centre of the story, lies a conviction that just as Jesus lived an itinerant and precarious life-style, so too the disciples. Again, just like Jesus, they are to confront evil and call their hearers to conversion of heart. This costly patterning of the disciples on the master will be explored more deeply in Mark 8-10.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

On the evidence of two or three witnesses the death sentence shall be executed; a person must not be put to death on the evidence of only one witness. (Deut 17:6)

A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offence that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained. (Deut 19:15)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

See also: Mk 1:16-20; 3:13-19.

The sending out of the twelve has a long echo in the first part of Mark’s narrative when it comes to the teaching on discipleship.

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are

Thought for the day

The handing on of the faith—evangelisation to use a technical term—is the task of *everyone* in the church today: family members, catechists, pastoral workers, the ordained. It is our great challenge and the one thing necessary. And yet, who dares today to take up such a role? Our Gospel portrays key dimensions: the sense of being sent or called, the choice of life-style based on that of Jesus, the confidence to face not being made welcome and yet to continue for the sake of the joy of the Gospel.

Prayer

God of the Good News, you spoke your word and disclosed your heart in Jesus of Nazareth. Help us who are called to take to heart the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation. May we know the action of the Spirit, and so inspired may we inspire others as well.

ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:34-38)

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:33-37)

So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to

become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

ST PAUL

Ironic and yet utterly in earnest, Paul writes:

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. (1 Corinthians 4:8-13)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 7 The background to this story starts in the earlier call of the first disciples in Mark 1:16-21 and continues in the sending out in Mark 3:3-19. The specific instructions here are an empowerment to share in the ministry of Jesus himself and to do the things which he was doing. They participate in his authority in word and in power. Two by two—as mutual support. The unclean spirits represent the world of evil which is in opposition to the salvation offered in Jesus. The spirits have a relatively high profile in Mark. The Greek verb “to send” is *apostellō* from which we get our word apostle.

Verse 8 Mark permits a walking stick in v. 8. Contemporary readers would see here some similarity with Cynic philosophers, who were allowed to carry bread and a staff. A key word in Mark is “the way”. Depending on the context, it is variously translated—here for instance by “journey.” It can mean simply a road or path (2:23; 4:4, 15; 10:46; 11:8). However, Mark often has in mind the deeper meaning of the Christian Way, as here and in Mark 1:2-3; 6:8; 8:3, 27; 9:33-34; 10:17, 32, 52; 12:14. Compare the early Christian usage in Acts: *Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and*

murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

Verse 9 Sandals are permitted in v. 9. Both a staff and sandals are forbidden in the corresponding stories in Matthew and Luke. *Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food.* (Matt 10:9-11) Mark may well be creating a contrast with popular preachers of Cynic philosophers. They went totally barefoot.

On the other hand, Mark contains no prohibition on entering non-Jewish territory – a signal perhaps that even Mark is updated to take account of different conditions outside of Palestine. A real dependence on God remains a requirement as we see in Mark 6:35-44 and 8:1-9.

Verse 10 Remaining in the same house seems strange—there is not yet any evidence of the contrary, unless it reflects later missionary abuse when those sent chose better lodgings when they could. Something of the sort is behind the text from the *Didache*, a first-century Christian document, which reads:

Now concerning the apostles and prophets, deal with them as follows in accordance with the rule of the Gospel. Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. But he is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is need, in which case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle leaves, he is to take nothing except bread until he finds his next night's lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet. (Did 11:3-6)

Verse 11 This is a prophetic gesture and reflects the later church mission (the Twelve meet no opposition in Mark's narrative). The meaning is not altogether clear, but it may have something to do with the practice of Jews on crossing into the Holy Land, who would take the trouble to shake Gentile dust from their feet. Compare Acts 13:51 and 18:6.

Verse 12 “Proclaimed” = effective proclamation. Repent = conversion, in the sense of a change of world-view. As always, it means much more than sorrow for past sin etc. It is a reorienting of your life in view of the coming kingdom of God. Cf. Mk 1:14-15. Notice that within the ministry, the Twelve proclaim God and his kingdom, whereas in the post-Easter context, they will proclaim Jesus.

Verse 13 In this way, the disciples share in the ministry of Jesus. The detail of anointing with oil, not typical of Jesus, may reflect early Church practice. It was a common remedy in the society of the time.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Jesus gave the disciples a share in his mission by sending them out ahead of him. It was a gesture of trust and confidence on his part, even though they did not fully understand his mission. Have you ever been surprised by the trust shown to you by others to speak or act on their behalf?

2. Jesus sent the disciples out two by two. Perhaps your experience gives you examples of the value of having another with you when engaged in an important task.

3. The instructions given by Jesus may seem strange. They were intended to counteract practices by bogus preachers who used preaching as a mask for mon-eymaking. The disciples of Jesus were to focus on the mission given to them, not on their own comforts. Is it your experience that vested interests can impede a task, whereas having the right motives makes your mission more effective?

4. The task of the disciples was to call people to repent, (*metanoia* = conversion, change the way we look at God and at other people). The core of the mission of Jesus was to change the attitude of people towards God from fear to trust. He also wanted people to see that life was a gift from God who loved them and wanted them to live it in all its fullness and abundance, despite its difficulties. Who have been the disciples, the people in your life who have called you to be more trusting in God? To whom have you given this call?

PRAYER

God of justice, God of salvation, from every land you call a people to yourself. Yours in the work we do, yours the message we carry.

Keep your Church single-minded and faithful to you. Let failure not discourage us nor success beguile our hearts, as you send us to proclaim the gospel.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

In this liturgical year, excerpts from Ephesians are read for the next seven Sundays. The passages are often of a high literary quality, even poetic (such as today's blessing). They form a deep meditation on the reality of Christ and on the nature of our discipleship. This particular letter was, in Christian tradition, as influential as the Fourth Gospel.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Date and context are related to authorship (see below). Ephesians and Colossians were written perhaps between 50+ and AD 100, to a community or communities somewhere in the Lycos Valley, in Asia Minor. (The earliest manuscripts omit the "in Ephesus") in v. 2.) The purpose of the letter seems not to have been a specific problem or prob-

lems but rather identity formation in a more general sense.

KIND OF WRITING

All agree that Ephesians is a letter. After that, there considerable dispute as to what kind of letter. Also, authorship was much less "neat" in antiquity and it could include a disciple writing in the person of a master (taking on his identity or *prosōpopeia*). Such writing in the style of someone else was taught in the rhetorical schools. Many scholars hold that Ephesians is Deutero-Pauline, that is, written by a disciple to bring Pauline teaching up to date in a new context. We note the following: (i) The text *is* within the Pauline tradition. (ii) Idiosyncracies of expression and grammar lead one to think this letter is not from Paul directly. (iii) The peculiar relationship of Ephesians to Colossians—exhibiting evident overlap and yet significant dissimilarities—would seem to indicate an unusual genesis for this text. (iv) The range of topics differs from the usual Pauline concerns (e.g. justification, sin, law, promise etc.).

In any case, our passage is a prayer, corresponding to the thanksgivings found in the genuine Pauline letters but at the same time with its own character.

RELATED PASSAGES

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15–20)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 3 In Greek, this prayer is one long sentence. English versions vary in

the way they break it up. The whole unit is a *berakah*, that is, a blessing found in both Hebrew and pagan traditions. V. 3 deals with God and what he has done for us in Christ.

Verses 4-6a The verbs are a key here: chose and predestined. Why this extraordinary election? That we might be holy and, as a result, that we might praise him. "In Christ" can be well understood as "by means of Christ." The cosmic range of this election has its roots in the Easter faith of the early Christians.

Verses 6b-7 In these verses, we move from the higher, transcendent plane down to the level of history—what happened for us in Jesus. The first verse picks up the idea of grace, the praise of which lasts until v.8. It begins with a technical term for Jesus, the Beloved. Redemption means deliverance, in the context. A consequence of this deliverance is forgiveness of sins.

Verses 8-10 From v.8, the writer reflects on the *riches of his grace*. The mystery is used in the special sense of God's plan revealed to the apostles and prophets. In Greek, "plan" is the evocative word *oikonomia*, used in Vatican II as the economy of salvation. The gathering up into unity in Christ reflects something of Jesus' own programme, the ingathering of Israel. This unity is in contrast to experience and against the forces of evil.

Verses 11-12 The community of faith enters here, a community heirs directed towards an inheritance. Note the implied contrast of we (first generation? Jews?) and you (later generation Gentiles).

Verses 13-14 Key expressions are used: word of truth, gospel of salvation, seal of the Spirit, all evoking the experience of the recipients. NB seal as a mark of ownership and Spirit as a "down payment" or first instalment. Hence the praise of his glory.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Can I identify with the thrilling sense of purpose found in this passage?
2. What does it mean to me to be "in Christ"? Are there evident practical consequences day to day?

PRAYER

Flood our hearts and lives with love, lavish your grace upon us, that we may open our lips and praise your name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Go, prophesy to my people Israel

Amos 7:12 And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Amos 7:14 Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, 15 and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

A distinction has been made between “the royal system”, which is one of exploitation, encouraging passivity, and “the prophetic system”, which is one of sharp, alternative critique, aimed at action and engagement. In the royal system, the establishment stakeholders all wish for convention and continuity, chiefly to ensure that those the top manage to stay at the top. The prophetic voice, however, breaks convention and challenges the primacy of the immediate past. Although there are prophets who are priests (e.g. Ezekiel), the priestly class in general supports the monarchy, on whom they depend. This is the background to the clash between priest and prophet in our reading.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Amos, from Tekoa, worked in the 8th century bc, during the reigns of Jeroboam II (786–746 bc) in Israel and Uzziah (783–742) in Judah. Although from the south (Judea), he worked in the north (Israel). He was relatively well off, being a breeder of sheep and grower of mulberry trees. Nevertheless, he was unexpectedly called to proclaim God’s word away from home. It was a period of apparent consolidation and prosperity. Yet, in the prophet’s view all was not at all well: the landed élite had created large estates by taking the property of the poor. Against the leisure and luxury of the powerful, Amos preached justice. He also supported the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem (Judah).

The book of the prophecies which has come down to us has had a complex evolution. It shows the following structure:

Superscription 1:1-2:the context of Amos’ ministry as a prophet.

Oracles against the nations 1:3-2:13: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab and, surprisingly, Judah and Israel. The writing here is powerful.

Attacks on specific groups 3:1-6:14: the groups are all named and shamed.

Vision reports interspersed with oracles 7:1-9:10. The vision reports (very famous) drive the final section. Within the vision reports the confrontation at Bethel—our reading—is found.

Promise to the house of David 9:11-15: this concludes the book as we now have it.

KIND OF WRITING

Our story is one of confrontation between the royal and prophetic systems. It is interesting to note that Amos is not forbidden to or prevented from preaching, but simply told to do it back home. As Amos is not the speaker here, it looks as if this is a remembered anecdote inserted here by the redactor of the prophecies. By this time, Amos is well known and a danger. Perhaps we have here is the closure of his ministry in the north.

As a literary form, two scenes, vv.10-11 and 12-13 prepare for the tremendous and terrifying oracle in 14-17.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The ferocity of Amos’ invective may be felt in a few key passages: 2:13-16; 3:12 (NB); 4:1-3; 6:3-7.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 12 The previous two verses as essential for understanding this event: *Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, ‘Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’”* (Amos 7:10–11) There are three people called Amaziah in the OT. All we know of this one was that he was priest at Bethel and that he reported Amos to the king. Bethel: In reconstituting the kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam reestablished Dan and Bethel as border cults at the northern and southern extremities of his territory. “Conspired” is very strong, suggesting organised rebellion. Any undermining of royal authority must be resisted by the “state church” at Bethel.

Verse 13 This is a perfect illustration of priestly support for the status quo. Cf. 1 Kings 12:31-33 for the story of Bethel as a royal sanctuary.

Verse 14 In effect, Amos points out that the priest (!) had omitted to take account of YHWH. This biographical claim has been understood in various ways. The traditional picture of a poor country lad catapulted to prophecy has to be set aside. It is likely that Amos was a breeder of sheep and not just a shepherd. The denial is also interesting. Either he is saying my authority does not rest on status but on calling or he is saying he was never a member of a prophetic guild. Either way, YHWH is sovereign.

Verse 15 In other words, it is not the prophet but God who decides the when and the where of a prophet’s activity. It may be that behind this verse is a conviction expressed at the end of the book that Israel’s destiny would be better linked with that of Judah. At the time, this would have seemed an unlikely proposition, because Israel was much more prosperous and far more powerful. Yet, Amos understood that the great imperial forces of the time—especially Assyria—would eventually asphyxiate the northern state.

Amaziah then receives a devastating oracle in Amos 7:16-17.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Sometimes the word we received in prayer or *lectio* is difficult and we are tempted to set it aside in some way. *But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.* (James 1:22)
2. The priest in the story attempts to compromise. He knows Amos is a genuine bearer of the word, but wants him off his patch, to protect the king. What has been my experience of such dubious compromise?
3. Amos is a straight as a dye. He knows exactly who he is and who is it who called him. Give thanks to God for such awareness in my own life.

PRAYER

God of the Word: open our hearts when you speak to us that we may hear your word, whether the time is right or not.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 85 (84); Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:6b-13

READINGS 1 AND 3

The reading from Amos anticipates the call and sending out of the Twelve. They are taken from their ordinary lives; the decision is not really theirs but belongs to the sovereign Lord.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

As a whole, Psalm 85 (84 in the liturgical numbering) might make a good response. But as it stands, the parts chosen as a response don't really fit the rejection of Amos. Rather, they portray a kind of ideal receptivity to a prophet, perhaps in contrast and in preparation for the good reception of the apostles.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Amos 7:12-15

Two figures clash in this story. One represents a powerful religious institution and the other is called by God to bear his word. The reaction of Amos is full of courage.

Second reading

Ephesians 1:3-14

Our next reading is really not a reading but a prayer, a very poetic prayer. The prayer tells the story of all God has done for us in Jesus...as a result, we too are portrayed in the prayer!

Gospel

Mark 6:7-13

As Jesus shares his vocation with the Twelve, why does he give such surprisingly detailed instructions about what to bring and what to wear? Could it be that the followers (and their leaders!) are meant to resemble the master?

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 16 July

Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Isaiah 1:10-17

Like many another prophet, Isaiah notices the gap between worship and living, between what we say and what we do. God's assessment is graphically described and the responsorial Psalm is

absolutely perfect.

Matthew 10:34-11:1

This passage can surprise and even offend. The sword, however, is not the sword of judgment but the sword of decision, as the following verses show.

Tuesday 17 July

Isaiah 7:1-9

A terrifying moment of threat is described: *the hearts of the people shuddered as the trees of the forest shudder in front of the wind.* It calls for a word of God and that word is strong: God is and will be faithful if you remain faithful.

Matthew 11:20-24

Again, a difficult passage. It portrays Jesus the prophet, encountering rejection. Yet, like the prophets of old he continues to announce his offer, even if in blistering terms.

Wednesday 18 July

Isaiah 10:5-7,13-16

The Assyrian assault was interpreted as God's reaction to injustice and idolatry. In our reading a merely political or military reading is excluded. Instead, God made use of foreigners and even invasion to call Israel back to fidelity.

Matthew 11:25-27

Jesus exclaims a powerful prayer to God. To understand it well, we need to remember that the learned and the clever are *powerful* while children are *powerless*. Thus Jesus' message is for the oppressed.

Thurs. 19 July

Isaiah 26:7-9, 12, 16-19

Today we hear a marvellous cry from the heart. Both the human condition and grace of God come to poetic expression. It would be good to take this passage home and read it quietly to yourself. Matthew 11:28-30

In Jewish tradition, the Torah or the Law was regarded as a (very) welcome yoke, that is, guidance which you help the faithful plough a straight furrow in life. Jesus' yoke or burden is, in addition, easy and light.

Friday 20 July

St Apollinaris, bishop and martyr

Isaiah 38:1-6,21-22,7-8

A king is seriously ill and bargains with God. We would probably all accept the deal he gets!

Matthew 12:1-8

At a surface level, this passage contrasts in a familiar way legalism and sensible flexibility. At a deeper level, it takes to the identity of Jesus himself, "something greater than the Temple."

Saturday 21 July

St Laurence of Brindisi, priest and doctor

Micah 2:1-5

Like Isaiah and many of the prophets, Micah is very much against injustice, exploitation and oppression. He does not mince his words!

Matthew 12:14-21

The historical Jesus did, of course, encounter opposition. (He could hardly have said what he said and done what he did and escape severe criticism.) The historical Jesus may very well have grasped his destiny of suffering in the light of the prophets, and in particular in the light of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah, as in our reading.



*Cease to do evil.
Learn to do good,
search for justice,
help the oppressed,
be just to the orphan,
plead for the widow.*