

Sent Out to Serve

Mark 1: 14-20

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The most epic show to ever come to the small community in Maine I grew up in was a Grateful Dead concert at the short-track speedway. My friends and I always wondered why our parents would tell us about it. It could have been the fact they were excited to see Jerry Garcia healthy again for the *In the Dark Tour*, or the miles of bumper to bumper traffic along Route 26, or that we were the spring babies following that summer of '88 show. Who knows?

One of my friend's parents absolutely loved the band. I learned the stacks of cassette tapes on their living room shelves were personal recordings from countless live shows. They were "Deadheads," the people who travelled from one Grateful Dead show to the next. They were a community that travelled together, ate together, and sold tie-dye t-shirts and veggie burritos together to help pay the bills. These were always looking for the "vibe" or "x-factor" to help them transcend their circumstances. They got caught up in it all at the shows listening to the psychedelic jams that were never the same twice. They felt a call to go out and be a part of this travelling counter-culture, so they went.

If you talk to Deadheads, you will find some left behind more than others. Surely, there were plenty of teenagers and twenty-somethings with nothing to lose. Others might have been labelled irresponsible for leaving behind a good job or family.

In the early days of his ministry, Jesus travelled around Galilee sharing his own counter-culture that he called the Kingdom of God. It was good news that the world does not have to be as it seems. He offered an alternative to the empire of Caesar where the powerful were exulted and drew their strength from the numbers who served them. Jesus offered a vision of a community in which the powerful were humble and drew their strength from the numbers they served. It was a community filled with such caring and compassion that the disciples could not help but get caught up in it all.

These were not just young folks with nothing to lose. James and John ran a fishing business with their father that was successful enough to have hired hands. We find out a few verses later that Simon was married. When Jesus called them to follow him and serve, they got caught up in the Kingdom's net, and they knew it was time to go. The net had to be cast wider.

Now, let's be clear: I do not pretend to be as charismatic as Jerry Garcia and surely I am not Jesus. I was amazed that these teenagers gave up a week of their summer to go on a mission trip—some even two weeks to attend NYE also. These teens heard God calling, they went out, and they let themselves get caught up in the net of serving others.

As you just heard, these were experiences in which they found a deeper sense of purpose, community, and joy. Going out to serve, which mission is all about, gets you all tangled in God's Kingdom, and it is nothing short of transformational.

The Grateful Dead's drummer, Mickey Hart, used to say the band was not in the music business; they were in the transportation business. Their jams carried people to new levels of spiritual consciousness.

Although the Church sends out members to serve, we are not in the transportation business; we are in the transformation business. We go out and seek to transform the world and ourselves by sharing the Kingdom of God.

While we celebrate our young people and their chaperones for going out, we should know that this business is not just for them. We see in the gospel that there comes a time in our lives when it is time to set down our personal nets, to go out, and get caught up in God's Kingdom.

There is no shortage of places we can bring this ministry to. Just this summer, flooding ruined thousands of homes in southern Louisiana. I am sure you could think of countless other places, many of them much closer to home, which could use our ministry. At the moment, we are already cooking up a trip for our youth next summer. If you want to organize a group of First Church adults to go on a mission trip, come talk to me. I promise to support you, help you organize it, and, yes, even go with you.

So, if you hear Jesus calling you to drop your nets for a while and serve, muster the courage to get up and go. Just ask one of these teens, the experience will leave you nothing short of transformed.

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