

## **Shake It Off and Get Back In the Game**

(Mark 6:1-13)

I remember as a kid growing up playing little league baseball in the summer. I learned an expression – probably from my dad – that has stuck with me all these years. I was a catcher and catchers just seem to be prone to injury. I know I took my share of foul tips on the hand and foot. Then there were also those occasional “tooth rattlers” that ricocheted off my sturdy catcher’s mask.

When ever I got hurt I could rely on my dad to holler from the dugout: “Shake it off and get back in the game.” Now I don’t know just how physically therapeutic “shaking it off” really is, but I do know that getting up out of my crouch and walking around shaking the injured body part did seem to make me feel better. Perhaps it increases the flow of blood to the injury and lessens the pain, but psychologically it usually worked. Shake it off and get back in the game.

This prescription for pain worked pretty well for bruised and injured egos as well. I remember one time getting laid out flat by a base runner coming from third base trying to score on an outfield hit. I was in some pain, but it was my pride that was really hurt – getting flattened as I defended home plate and letting a run score to boot. Shake it off and get back in the game, my dad would always say.

This advice resonates with this morning’s gospel reading. As Jesus sends out the disciples his admonition is to shake the dust off your feet and go on about you mission if you aren’t

welcomed in some towns. Shake it off and get back in the game. Please pray with me:

And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you this morning, O God. Open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and the word proclaimed. Teach us, we pray, to shake it off and to get back in the game of life as we go about the task of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. In his precious name we pray. Amen.

The sending out of the twelve disciples is a sharing in the authority and mission of Jesus’ public ministry. It is the earliest form of the Christian missionary work that we recognize today. The disciples were an extension of the ministry of Jesus Christ, just as we are extensions of that ministry today. They were not independent of Jesus, but were engaged in ministries that served to extend the teaching and healing of Jesus into the world beyond his immediate presence. In this way, the disciples were like the “hands of Christ” much in the same way that we are the hands of Christ today.

From Mark’s description we know that the disciples were sent out in pairs or “two by two.” The pairing of the disciples is a model for mission that the Church of Latter Day Saints

has followed in its efforts to bring Mormonism to the four corners of the earth. Mormon missionaries are always sent out in pairs. The purpose of the “two by two” rule is to provide support for each other and to also hold one another accountable for living out by example the very gospel message they are sent to deliver.

The “two by two” rule was just one of several rules that served to guide the disciples and early Christian missionaries. It was important that they be able to quickly adapt to whatever circumstances they might encounter in their ministry. Then and now, Christian missionaries must be able to understand and adapt to the different cultures of the people they come to serve.

It was Jesus’ intention to bring healing, peace and hope to people through the ministry of his disciples. He didn’t send out the twelve to be agents of colonialism or political expansion. But in the first century Mediterranean culture – and in our contemporary time – some folks are not always receptive to hearing the good news of the gospel. Sometimes a situation may become too dangerous or difficult for the missionaries to remain. For their own safety, it is sometimes necessary to “shake off the dust” and leave, with the hope of returning under less dangerous times.

In biblical times, this gesture of “shaking the dust off” one’s feet could be interpreted as pronouncing a curse on a town. In Luke’s terms, “shaking off the dust” is meant to be a testimony before God that a town has refused to hear God’s word. It symbolizes the need to move on knowing that others are waiting to hear the gospel message. Jesus tells his disciples then and us today to

“shake it off and get back in the game.”

Today, it is important that we understand that taking the gospel message into the world – that is to say, making disciples of Jesus Christ – requires a certain degree of patience and persistence. As disciples or missionaries we shouldn’t be too quick to pronounce this ancient curse on those who don’t receive us warmly and embrace our message of peace and hope. Sometimes it’s our desire to persist that pays big dividends.

I am reminded of the story of a small town basketball coach as told in the movie “Hoosiers.” This coach was a former college coach whose career was ruined by recruiting violations. He was given a second chance by his friend who was the principal of this small town Indiana high school.

When first he arrives in town, the new coach is well received by the local basketball fans as they anticipate once again having a winning team. Now you have to remember that Indiana is big on basketball. This small town is no different! As the new coach tries to adjust to coaching in a small town environment he comes under some pretty close scrutiny as the town doesn’t always understand some of his techniques.

His strategy is to make the small team a unit by improving all their fundamental skills at playing basketball, rather than building a team around one good player. This return to basics frustrates the local fans as they don’t see an immediate return to winning ways. Some of the locals make life difficult for the new coach by interfering with his teaching.

At one point they even call a town meeting and take a vote to fire him.

But the coach doesn't back down; he remains committed to developing a winning team by teaching the basics. He is persistent and loyal to his friend who had faith enough in his abilities to hire him in the first place. Over time he builds a strong team that goes on to win the state championship.

At several points in the unfolding controversy over his coaching he could have left and moved on to another town, shaking the dust off his shoes. Instead he stayed and through persistence he persevered. As my dad would probably say, he "shook it off and got back in the game."

Making disciples of Jesus Christ requires persistence and perseverance. Discipleship begins when we walk out the door of the church – when we move beyond the four walls and take the gospel message into the world. The fact is, discipleship is a life-long proposition that requires our whole being. Jesus sent the disciples out two by two with the bare necessities of life to bring a message of hope and peace to a troubled and hopeless world.

Our task today is no different. Equipped with our God-given talents we are called to share the gospel

message with the world in different ways –according to our spiritual gifts. Some are called to serve here in local community in ministries like the walk-in ministry or the food pantry or PADS. Others are called to step out periodically on short term missions like the Appalachia Service Project or the Red Bird Mission in Kentucky. Some are even called to go full-time into the mission field in places like Africa and Asia and right here in the United States. Then there are a small few that are called to give their lives by becoming martyrs for the sake of the gospel.

For most of us, living out a Christian life is the best way to be a witness to the commitment to discipleship. It's important for us to not be overcome with the frustrations we may encounter in living out of a truly Christian lifestyle; to not give in to the temptation and be too quick to "shake the dust from our feet" and move on to the next town. Be persistent and dogged as you take up your ministry – whatever it might be, wherever it might take you. Don't be discouraged with lack of success or even failure. Progress can be measured over time through modest gains. And remember, if you do become discouraged, shake it off and get back in the game.