

Semicontinuous

2 Sam. 5:1–5, 9–10

Ps. 48

Complementary

Ezek. 2:1–5

Ps. 123

2 Cor. 12:2–10

Mark 6:1–13

Hit the Road!

**Goal for
the Session**

Adults will discern the role of hospitable reception in Mark 6 and practice aspects of Christian witness.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 6:1–13

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Efraín Agosto

When they come to one place, they are to stay in the first home that receives them (v. 10). There should be no appearance of looking for the best meals or the most comfortable bed in town! However, should their message be rejected at a home or by an entire town, they should exercise the practice of “shaking the dust from one’s feet” (v. 11). Rabbis in later traditions talked of this symbolic way of returning from Gentile lands to one’s sacred spaces. Followers of Jesus perhaps used the practice to symbolize judgment on unrepentant places. However, the shaking off of dust could be a hopeful sign if such people and places would thereby see the seriousness of the matter and mend their ways.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Mark D. W. Edington

That Jesus cannot give authority he does not already possess is meant to make plain the *nature* of his kingship. But his commissioning of the disciples also makes a further claim about the *exercise* of his authority: Jesus *delegates kingly authority to those who come in faith*. Christology here is a case study in servant leadership. Jesus, deriving his authority (the “what”) from absolute and obedient faith in God (the “why”), shares his authority willingly (the “how”) with those who share in his faith.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Michael L. Lindvall

These stories might raise our anxiety about evangelism and the potential for rejection that sharing the gospel risks. Such discomfort is widespread, especially among “mainline” Christians, who may be justifiably concerned about coercive or emotionally manipulative methods of proclaiming the Good News. Many Christians would sooner talk about *anything* else: sex, their salary, anything but what they believe about God. But evangelism is not “to get them on our side” or even “to grow the church,” but simply to tell others about the God who has come to mean so much to us. This is an action performed out of love, not competition or anxiety.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Beverly Zink-Sawyer

Mark continues to raise in this text the question he repeatedly raises in his Gospel: who is this Jesus? In this story it is not those who are encountering Jesus for the first time but those who have known him for years who are asking questions about Jesus’ identity and responding to his teaching with amazement. The word for us in this text is that we are not held responsible for the response to our ministries in Christ’s name, but only for our own faithfulness. With such assurance, we can witness boldly and faithfully.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 6:1–13

Focus on Your Teaching

Most adults have experiences in which attempts to communicate something of deep value have been rebuffed. The more painful of such experiences may have been when the inhospitable reception has come from friends or colleagues or even family. Fear of rejection may paralyze or silence us. Today's session explores the dynamics of rejection and acceptance regarding the gospel and its call. Part of today's passage may be a troubling reminder of estrangements in communities and families for some of your adults. Another part may be challenging for adults who shy away from anything resembling evangelism.

Prepare me, O God, as I prepare to lead this session. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for July 12, 2015

For Responding

- option 1: Resource Sheet 1
- option 3: Resource Sheet 2

In summer, it is likely that some or most participants will not have been present at every preceding session. Be prepared to offer insights from previous sessions where few or none here today were present.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome participants as they arrive. Introduce any guests or newcomers.

Have participants silently reflect on an experience when something important they had to say was dismissed by others. An example could be an important contribution they had to make to a discussion. After a minute of silent reflection, invite them to think of a time when they have dismissed another person's message. Discuss as a group both legitimate and illegitimate reasons for dismissing another's message.

Say that today's session tells of an episode that depicts the dismissive reception Jesus received in a place and among people who knew him quite well.

Offer this prayer or another of your choosing:

Make us mindful of your presence, O God, as we open to the leading of your Spirit and to these companions with whom we gather. Amen.

EXPLORING

Remind the participants that the focus scriptures for the last four sessions have all come from the Gospel of Mark. Invite adults to summarize what they have encountered in those previous episodes by way of responding to these questions:

- ✪ What have we learned about the ministry and teachings of Jesus?
- ✪ What have we learned about the disciples who follow Jesus?
- ✪ What have we learned about the reception given Jesus by others, positive and negative?

Distribute Bibles and explain that today's story has two distinct parts. As a result, the two portions will be read and initially discussed separately.

Go around the group and have people number off one, two, three. Without moving, assign each number the following characters: ones will be the disciples, twos will be the hometown crowd, and threes will be the few people that Jesus cures. Have the group silently read Mark 6:1–6a from the perspective of their characters. As a whole group, discuss:

- ✿ What might your characters tell someone who was not in synagogue that day about what happened?
- ✿ What you might your characters come away thinking about Jesus?

Spend a few moments considering what might explain the difference of perspectives of these characters on the same event.

Read Mark 6:6b–13 aloud to the group. Invite initial comments about or questions raised by this portion of the text.

Invite participants to consider these two portions as a single narrative. Discuss:

- ✿ What messages are presented about hospitable and inhospitable receptions?
- ✿ What does the whole passage reveal about the nature of faith and witness?

Have adults look at verses 5 and 13, and take notice of the contrasting words (and consequences) of “few” and “many.” Invite participants to imagine the scene in the Nazareth synagogue the following week, when reports of the “many” who were cured reached them. Discuss:

- ✿ What might this cause the “hometown” folks to do in response, and why?
- ✿ What changes might be necessary on their part to change the outcome of “few” to “many” healed should Jesus return?

Explain that Mark is not the only Gospel to narrate this episode of Jesus’ returning to his hometown synagogue and his sending of the disciples in mission. Invite participants to read silently Luke 4:16–30 and Luke 9:1–6. Discuss similarities and differences between the two accounts. Consider how Luke might fill in some of the details for understanding Mark—or vice versa—particularly regarding the issue of how faith and witness are affected by the reception they are given.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 6:1–13). Read and briefly discuss the “Now What?” excerpt. As a transition to Responding, invite participants to name faithful ministries they have seen that may not be received hospitably but are clearly examples of Christian ministry.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session.

1. **The “E” Word** Mark’s narrative makes clear that witness and evangelism are central to faith, even and especially when we have misgivings about them because of manipulative practices of them.

**EASY
PREP**

Read the “So What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Engage in a frank discussion regarding feelings about and experiences of evangelism, good and bad. Identify ways that the passage in Mark might help us recover this calling of faith. Encourage adults to consider one act of witness or evangelism they can do alone or with others in the coming week.

- 2. Hospitable Listening** One way to encourage receptiveness to the witness we might bring to others is to practice hospitable listening to what others would bring to us. Discuss why listening is an important skill in communication in general—and how listening on our part could be a critical prelude to our ability to bear witness to faith.

Form pairs and have each person spend no more than two minutes telling one of the stories they thought of in the Gathering activity about dismissing others or being dismissed. Have the “listener” silently hear the “talker” and then summarize in thirty seconds or less the main message they heard back to the “talker.” Switch roles and repeat the process. Keep time and help move the activity along. Encourage adults in the coming week to identify situations where they might better listen to what others are trying to say, especially those who feel dismissed.

- 3. Faith and Witness: A Case Study** Witness to faith must sometimes be made no matter what the cost or reception incurred. Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (Faith and Witness: The Case of Hugh Thompson). Review the questions at the beginning. Ask for a volunteer to read the story of Hugh Thompson aloud to the group. Following a time of silent reflection, use the review questions to guide your discussion. Encourage adults to identify one or two things from Thompson’s story that strike them most powerfully. Challenge them to allow those elements from his story to influence their practice of faith and witness in the coming week.

Emotions summoned by recollection of the Vietnam War may still be raw for some of your adults. Encourage participants, regardless of their feelings about the war, to give this case study a hospitable reception.

CLOSING

Gather the group in a circle. Recall how Mark’s story began with Jesus encountering a rocky reception at home, and then dispatching his disciples in mission. Invite adults to call out something they will carry with them this week from that reception given Jesus and/or the commissioning of the disciples.

Note how Mark phrases the commissioning: Jesus “began” to send them out. Affirm that what happened in Mark is just the beginning, and that we are the ones Jesus continues to send.

Close with this commissioning or one of your own fashioning:

You are called of Christ, and so you are sent:

To proclaim Christ’s gospel, to embody Christ’s compassion.

You are called of Christ—go then in peace.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for July 12, 2015, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on Mark 6:1–13

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Faith and Witness: The Case of Hugh Thompson

As you read the following narrative, keep these questions before you:

- What words and deeds comprise Christian witness in this story?
- Where do you identify hospitable and inhospitable receptions to those elements of Christian witness in this story?
- What does this story reveal to you about the nature of faith and witness?



At Emory University several years ago, honorary degrees were being awarded; the recipients made the requisite speeches. As is often the case, the students chatted through the whole ceremony. In fact, there was only one moment when they actually listened. “It was when a man named Hugh Thompson was speaking. Thompson was probably the least educated man on the platform. . . . He . . . did not finish college, choosing instead to enlist in the Army, where he became a helicopter pilot.



“On March 16, 1968, he was flying a routine patrol in Vietnam when he happened to fly over the village of Mai Lai just as American troops, under the command of Lieutenant William Calley, were slaughtering dozens of unarmed . . . villagers—old men, women, and children. Thompson set his helicopter down between the troops and the remaining . . . civilians. He ordered his tail-gunner to train the helicopter guns on the American soldiers, and he ordered the gunmen to stop killing the villagers. . . . Hugh Thompson’s actions saved the lives of dozens of people . . . he was almost court-martialed. . . . It was thirty years before the Army . . . awarded him the Soldier’s Medal.



“As he stood at the microphone, the . . . rowdy student body grew still.” And then Thompson talked about his faith. Simple words. Speaking of what his parents taught him as a child Thompson said, “They taught me, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’” The students were amazed at these “words of Jesus, words from Sunday school, words from worship, words of Christian testimony . . . they leapt to their feet and gave him a standing ovation.”¹

1. Tom Long, *Pulpit Resources* 32 (January–March 2004): 39.