



## **“The 12 Bumpkins”**

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### **Scripture (CEB):**

#### **Mark 6:6-13**

Then Jesus traveled through the surrounding villages teaching.

<sup>7</sup> He called for the Twelve and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority over unclean spirits.

<sup>8</sup> He instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a walking stick—no bread, no bags, and no money in their belts.

<sup>9</sup> He told them to wear sandals but not to put on two shirts.<sup>10</sup> He said, “Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. <sup>11</sup> If a place doesn’t welcome you or listen to you, as you leave, shake the dust off your feet as a witness against them.”

<sup>12</sup> So they went out and proclaimed that people should change their hearts and lives.<sup>13</sup> They cast out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with olive oil and healed them.

### **Sermon:**

It’s the easiest thing to say, “I can’t”.

Even my 3-year-old granddaughter says it, and she tries almost everything, once.

If we have been scolded, or teased, it is even easier to stop, to quit.

If we have been told we are too clumsy, or too dumb...we may never try at all.

I stopped singing to anyone, except my babies, after a few uncomfortable experiences in my youth.

I started singing out loud, again...in seminary when I was 38. I was in training to be a pastor and pastors sing, don't they?!

I had a very kind, very determined student teacher, (who sang in operas on the side) and he led a class of timid non-singers to a new place of greater confidence and singing!

In today's text, commentators make much of the instructions Jesus gives to the 12 disciples..."no bread, no bag, no money...not two shirts". Just a walking stick, and a friend to walk with.

I can't help but wonder about that other part of the instructions of Jesus...he gave them authority over unclean spirits, and the power to heal many.

These are the 12 bumpkins from the fishing villages and neighborhoods of Capernaum in Galilee. Stories say that at least one was a fiery rebel, one was a tax collector and the rest were fishermen. Most people now believe that they were young, in their teens and early twenties.

They were hardly city sophisticates. I rather think they were country bumpkins, not used to the glamour of cities, not highly educated. They were trained to be fishermen, or to extort money from their neighbors as a tax collector...maybe some of them were farmers. None of them were from the cities nearby.

So, I can't help wondering...what did Jesus do? How did he show them, convince them, that they had the authority to drive out unclean spirits, they had the power to heal?

Did they have practice sessions with Jesus? Did they practice on each other and their families, like nurses practice on each other, before they went out and about healing?

What changed, that these 12 went from fishermen and a tax collector and at least one fiery rebel...to healers, and teachers, and people with the authority to get others back into their right mind?

What would it take for you?

1. Certainly, it would be good to know you were not alone! The training was for all 12, and the sending was in pairs. These were folks you knew well, had shared life with for a good long time. They knew you snored, or what your favorite dessert was. You had already argued with them, joked with them, sat with Jesus and them. Yeah, you had someone trusted to talk to, run questions by, get feedback from. That would be very very significant.
2. Commentators say that the instructions of Jesus make it clear that the 12 were going to towns and villages that were filled with the working poor. Folks just like themselves. They were not dressing to impress, they were not carrying loads of cash. They would not be paying for a place at the Holiday Inn; they were going to stay in the home of whoever was welcoming, and be satisfied to have a bed, a meal and a roof over their head. They would not go seeking out the best house, but stay with those who were open to them. They were to go to people with whom they had much in common.
3. But there is something else. That self doubt, that fear of failure, that fear of being exposed to ridicule. That voice inside that says: "I can't". Something Jesus did, changed these 12 bumpkins, his 12 country friends, gave them courage and assurance, gave them the strength to try to be something new and different. Something Jesus gave them made them stronger, braver, clear-eyed and capable. Capable of great acts of goodness.

This quality of Jesus that he shared with the disciples, is the quality of God...God who is capable of bringing out the best in you, of calling forth in you that which you have been hiding but is still real, still wonderful, still inside you waiting to burst forth.

Sometimes, the humblest people can be Jesus, can be God, to you: the teacher who believes in you, the parent who trusts you, the boss who pushes you, the spouse (in my case) who said, "yes you can". Such people are in every corner of life.

Sometimes, it is a big burly guy who sings opera when he isn't in training to be a pastor...and he changes your self-understanding, your own possibility. He surely did to me.

Sometimes it is the knowledge that you have a companion at your side, as you face unknown villages and strange faces and desperate need. We all need friends with whom we can be truly honest, and hang on to when we are truly afraid.

We all, each and every one of us, need someone who understands us and stands beside us. Jesus sent them out together because it is not good to be alone.

And the one who goes with you, can also call you on your sh\*t! A true companion will challenge you, support you, question you. And as a true companion, you can do the same right back.

No, it is not good for us to be alone.

It is amazing for us, to hear the voice of Jesus, and the voice of God, saying: Yes, you can.

Yes, you need not fear.

Yes, I am with you, your constant companion, who loves you and will not leave you.

Yes, go out, do good. Heal hearts and lives.

Yes, you can.