

## **“Who, Me?”**

Mark 6:1-13

Sunday, March 18, 2018

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

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Archie was the name of the sexton, or the caretaker, at the First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, the church in which I grew up and where I was raised in the Christian faith. His full name was Archibald Preston, but everyone knew him as Archie. Archie was always at church. Whether we were there for a junior high lock-in or a Sunday morning worship service; whether it was a Sunday evening youth choir practice or helping my mother drop off clothing at the donation box in the basement in the middle of the week, Archie was always there. He'd be setting up tables, making minor repairs around the church, tending the tulips in the spring, mowing the lawn in the summer, overseeing the raking of the leaves in the fall, clearing the snow in the winter, year after year after year. Archie was one of the people who worked at the church, so you expected to see him sometimes ... but my memory is that Archie was ALWAYS there.

The First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor was, and still is, a very big church. When I was a child it had 4 full time ministers on the staff, plus a full-time church administrator, several full-time church secretaries, a professional organist *and* a professional music director, a student from the University of Michigan who served as the youth director, and Archie the sexton, the one responsible for the church buildings and grounds. Because so many people worked at the church, on Tuesday mornings they held weekly staff meetings. They began their staff meetings in the large, stone, cathedral-like sanctuary for a brief time of worship together, the sanctuary lined with beautiful stained-glass windows depicting the mighty acts of God, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – windows that kept my wandering childhood mind fascinated when the sermons went on too long.

As a college student I worked one summer as one of the church secretaries at my home church. Being the temporary, part-time employee, I was the one who usually remained in the office answering the telephones while the regular staff worshiped together in the sanctuary. I would hear them as the great pipe organ filled the entire building with its beautiful sound and as the staff raised their voices to sing hymns together as part of their worship. After worshiping together in the sanctuary with its dark wooden pews and its stone arches overhead, the staff would then adjourn to a classroom for their meeting and they would go right past the office where I sat and answered the phones and did my work.

I still remember the Tuesday morning when Archie led the staff's worship service. I don't remember hearing what Archie talked about, but I remember how the staff talked about Archie. Apparently, Archie, in all of his long years of faithfully serving the church, had never before been asked to lead the Tuesday morning staff devotions. I could hear the big heavy sanctuary doors creak open and the murmurs as the staff passed the open doorway of the main offices where I sat. "Archie did a good job!" "Archie did a great job!" "Archie really had some important things to say." "Archie really preached the Gospel!" (CT: reads for the Bible and say,) "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house" (Mark 6:4). Archie was a bearer of the good news of the Gospel that morning at the First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the people who heard him were astounded.

Now, I am quite certain that Archie's education was not at the level of the ordained ministerial staff. After all, you just about had to have your Doctor of Ministry degree and velvet stripes on your Geneva gown, with its clerical collar and long white tabs, to prove it in order to command the pulpit at the First Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Certainly, both the organist and the music director had their doctorates as well. It was *not* a low prestige church. And so, when Archie the sexton, without his advanced degrees and initials after his name, led the staff in worship, they were amazed at what they

heard. The Gospel preached – well! – by a rather simple and rather quiet man with a deep and profound faith.

How often it is that God uses the sometimes least-likely to be a bearer of the Good News. David, a shepherd boy, a young lad, called to be king of Israel. Mary, the mother of Jesus, an unmarried peasant woman. The shepherds who announced the Holy Birth, also unlikely candidates to proclaim the birth of the Savior of the world. The named and the unnamed women announcing the resurrection of Jesus to the disciples. Jesus himself, when he returned to his hometown, was seen as a rather nervy local kid who was getting too big for his britches. You see they had watched Jesus grow up, and knew him as an ordinary child who likely did the kinds of things that all young children do, including getting into trouble. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son, Mary’s little boy, the one who used to get into tiffs with his brothers and sisters?” “How can it be that HE is teaching such astonishing things in the temple of God?” “Who does he think he is?”

Our reading from Mark’s Gospel goes on to tell of how Jesus then called together his 12 disciples and began to send them out two by two. He gave them authority over unclean spirits; he sent them out to proclaim the gospel, to share the witness, to tell and live the good news of the love of God. The disciples themselves were pretty unlikely candidates for such a job. Fishermen, a tax collector, pretty ordinary fellows who were not above getting into their own arguments over who of them was the best. And yet, God used them too. Jesus didn’t send them first to seminary to learn the intricacies of classical theology. He did not send them to Dale Carnegie’s training course on effective communication and human relations skills for success. They took with them neither a copy of the latest edition of Emily Post’s Book of Etiquette nor a collection of Amy Dickinson’s advice columns. Instead, Jesus ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff – a walking stick – no bread, no bag, no money in their belts. Leave your spending money at home. Don’t even take money to buy your lunch. Just take the sandals on your feet and the clothing on your back. Go, and teach, and heal, and serve.

God calls pretty unlikely people. He called me. He also calls you. He calls the Archie Prestons and those with stripes on their clerical gowns. He calls the physicians who serve as missionaries overseas, and those who scrub the floors. He calls the Moms and the Dads, the sons and the daughters. And he orders us to take nothing for the journey except our faith, and our love, and our willingness to serve. Wherever we are. It may not be to a distant land. We are called to serve in our own backyard as well as across the fence. To live boldly on faith, trusting in God's power revealed through us.

Some people may be surprised ... a child hosting a Saturday night sleepover invites a friend to Sunday School or a teenager invites a friend to Sunday evening Youth Connections, and evangelism happens; a neighbor is struggling and God's love takes the form of a plate of homemade cookies delivered in the late afternoon; someone is lonely so we pick up the phone and the person on the other end of the phone hears the voice of God coming through our vocal chords, even when we can't hear it, and they hear that they are not alone and that someone genuinely cares. My friends, God's love can be revealed through each and every one of us, if we but give it the chance. We are each called to be bearers of the Good News of the Gospel. Let it happen. Please God, let it happen. Even through us. Even through us. Amen.