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### Winning the Game of Life

How many of you have played the game of life? You know with the little peg people and the plastic car? It was a popular board game in the 80's and 90's, but was originally published by Milton Bradley in 1860 as their first game, and at that time titled "The Checkered Game of Life." Until it was reintroduced to the market in the 1960's, simply as "Life." Either way the name of the game is collecting and accruing as much monetary stuff and value as you possibly can, like a college diploma and a mortgage, a spouse and children, insurance to back it all up, and so on and so forth. Until the game ends and then the winner is determined by, of course, the one who dies with (quote unquote) the most "toys". But is that how Life really is? Is this what it's all about? Collecting as much stuff and monetary value as we possibly can? What if the game of life doesn't have anything to do with how many (quote unquote) toys, or stuff, or monetary value we accrue, but with something greater. What if it has to do with something like what philosopher Martin Buber discovered, that, "All real living is meeting." Which I think Jesus actually captures quite perfectly here in our passage from Mark this morning.

While at first glimpse Jesus appears to simply throw his hands up as he enters his own hometown being greeted with a sense of disbelief and skepticism as the crowds state "Where did this man get all this?... is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary." To which Jesus, both famously and understandably responds, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." As he then calls the twelve, we are told, and begins to send them out two by two. Almost as if to say, "well... they won't listen to me anymore, here's looking at you." But, in all seriousness, there is a beauty in what Jesus does as he sends out his disciples. First in the mere fact that he sends them out two by two, with a companion, not one by one, all alone. Ensuring there is always someone with them to support them and care for them on their journey. Second he sends them out in humility, only allowing them to take what is absolutely necessary, which he says is "nothing... except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but [only] sandals and [one tunic]." Third they are to go in gratitude, as Jesus instructs "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place." Don't go looking for a better place to stay, don't waste hours looking for the best yelp reviews or try and discern which house belongs to the proverbial Jones'. Just go where you are welcomed and be thankful for what you are offered and given. And fourth, as my favorite Taylor Swift song goes, if they don't accept you, or listen, or care to interact, "Shake it off". As Jesus says, "If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." Just as you travel lightly in your life and ministry don't carry that baggage with you.

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus began his ministry by calling the twelve and performing his first miracle as he cast out an unclean spirit. But, now as we find Jesus today, in his own hometown he, as our Gospel author points out, is unable to do any deeds of great power, and so he sends his disciples to begin to perform their own miracles and lead own ministry in his name. Because while Jesus' own hometown may lack faith, or may simply deny him support, now preventing him from enacting his great and miraculous deeds, that does not mean his ministry has to end. In the sending out of the twelve here Jesus ensures that his ministry, and miracle, his message of love and even his life of service will live on as long as it continues to be shared and received.

I think a lot about what it means to follow Jesus, shocking I know, but really. In today's world where Jesus' name is used in so many ways to signify so many different things, I wonder what does it mean to truly follow Jesus. As I said to my spiritual director the other day, if I was truly following Jesus would I not give up my life and all my worldly possessions, my (quote unquote) toys. And go out into the world with "nothing... except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in [my] belt." Only one piece of clothing and one pair of shoes!?! Because I certainly have more than one tunic and more than one pair of sandals, and I don't want to give them away (not yet at least). And, what about calling people to repent, when I myself am still, or even always, in need of repentance? And then I remember Martin Buber and his infamous quote "all real living is meeting." And I think, maybe I too can live like the disciples, maybe I can even follow Jesus, in and as much as I seek to meet him and share him with those around me. Which might even begin to look like casting out demons, which right now to me look like all the ways we find ourselves divided and separated along ideological, political, racial, gendered, socioeconomic, you name it lines. Or even healing with oil, which could be as much as reaching out to give a hand or as easy moving in a little closer to listen more intently and give our time and attention to another, especially when we don't agree. We certainly may have to shake the dust off our feet from time to time. But how much more might we experience the life and ministry of Jesus should we simply accept the hospitality of others and reach out to share the love that is at that center of who we are? Who knows we might find out what it means to win at the game of life or more so to truly live it!