

Dan Phillips: Sandals

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Daniel Phillips

Sandals

This morning, I would like to speak to you about Seekers, the texts from the scriptures and my life, not necessarily in that order. But I do believe that there some themes in the texts that relates directly to who we are, what we are becoming, and why we are doing that. I will use my own life to illustrate my portion of our journey, with some expectation that my journey is not that different from most of us.

[Ezekiel 2:1-5](#) – The Prophetic Call

This text is passionate, angry even. It calls the prophet to stand up against all of society to proclaim they are wrong, because they have stopped listening to God. It calls for the prophet to challenge his whole society, his whole world, and tell them that they are actively opposing God's will. We often refer to this challenging of society's values as "counter-culture" because the persons involved are directly going against the cultural influences around them. And this challenge cannot be issued with passion, without emotional involvement. Because doing this task has such emotional results.

Of course, passion often leads us astray. We get angry, we get righteous, and then we get off track, and refuse to listen to anyone who tries to help us get back. In my life, this attitude has built a barrier between me and the family that taught me these values. Their passion pushed me away, especially as I disagreed more and more with their ideas.

My father is a Baptist minister. An Independent Baptist minister. For those of you who don't recognize the distinction, "Independent" means that he considered the Southern Baptist to be too liberal to associate with. To my father and his peers, this text said that God calls men, only men – sorry ladies, to be witnesses to a world that had lost touch with God: to be independent voices of a different set of values. So in my childhood I first heard the text from Ezekiel from the pulpit of a man who felt it applied to him. And I heard it in a context that made it appear that I, too, should respond to this call. I was taught that this was the essence of religion, of faith: God's people **must** be distinctive, different. To call this "counter-culture" is to weaken its appeal.

Because I have so often disagreed with the values of my parents, it is only lately that I have appreciated what a gift this was. To be taught from the beginning of life that it was alright, no, expected, to question the values that life presents: this is a good thing. This questioning of values, this passionate holding to what is right despite what others say, is an essential part of prophecy. Maybe **the** essential part.

And that's where this all connects to Seekers. This group is a group of prophets by this definition. The counter-cultural urges of this group also make that word seem very weak. I am reminded of the "ten ways to tell if you are a Seeker". My wife and I read those before we first attended, and could tell right then that this was a group of trouble-makers. And you are, we are. Of course, that's why we came here. And this is also a passionate group. It is a community of emotions, and is more capable of sharing those emotions than most groups, especially most churches.

Mark 6: 1-6 – The Prophetic Need

So now we turn to the Gospel of Mark. Here Mark tells us a story about Jesus returning to his "own country" as it is referred to in one version. Jesus comes home and speaks in his home church, or the rough equivalent. Certainly he could expect support here, in his home church. But no, the congregation did not like what he had to say. And they began to question his very character. They refused to accept that he had any right to speak as he did.

Now the most interesting part of this text is its affect on Jesus. The scriptures imply, no, they **state**, that he was unable to be the prophet he wanted to be because of their rejection of him. And as I read that, I wonder: why did Mark include this in his gospel? What are we to learn from this episode? As Jesus comments that a "**prophet**" is not without honor, save in his own country, the nature of being a prophet is being described here. A prophet is often rejected, questioned, emotionally assaulted. And the lesson here is that even the best of prophets needs a community.

In my own life, it has taken a long time for me to learn that lesson. The lessons of my childhood and my combative relations with my family often left me feeling that I must worship and praise only as an individual. Oh, sure, I could talk to my wife. And occasionally with other Christians, but churches represented no community for sharing. There was no passion; emotions were actively shunned. Often they felt to me like that congregation Jesus spoke to. This is not to imply that I have been or ever will be the kind of prophet that Jesus was, or that his disciples were, but the pain was often very similar.

And Seekers as a group has discovered recently how painful it can be to ask what the right values are. The question of where Seekers will meet has caused us to ask basic questions about who we are, and what we want to do and say. And like Jesus, we

have not enjoyed the process. And like Jesus, until we can grasp the essentials of "community" our ministry will be limited.

Mark 6: 7-12 – The Prophetic Work

I am very glad that Mark relates this story right after the rejection of Jesus in his home area. After Mark has shown one of the pitfalls of the prophetic life, he doesn't stop there. He then goes on to tell about Jesus sending out the twelve to do their own prophetic work. The link here is that Jesus has established his own community to replace that denied him. He has a group to associate with, a group so dedicated to the same values that he can send them out to do his work. And the power of prophecy and community together is reaffirmed.

The need for community while doing the prophetic work is reinforced by the sending of the Twelve "two by two". In individualistic America, probably each person would have gone by themselves. Jesus knows they will need support while they are working, and he establishes a "community" that travels with them. He is addressing emotional needs here, I believe, because he tells them also what to do when they are not accepted. He knows that will happen, and he knows that it must be dealt with.

In my own life, I have come to value/desire/crave community. I, like most of you, have belonged to other churches, have experienced other traditions, and have been disappointed. I want to belong to a group that worships God in a way that I can accept and understand, in a way that supports me as I support the group. I believe I have found that group here at Seekers, and I thank all of you for being part of it.

As for Seekers, we have the community. We have the call. We have the passionate commitment. Now we must do the work. We must decide what we are going to do. Or, to say it a better way, we must decide what we are called to do. And we must do

it. We must not let our own passions, which are necessary and important, lead us astray. We must not let rejection and disappointment, whether it is within the group or without, stop us. We have a mission: to be the light of the world. We have something to offer the world we live in. Let us work in the knowledge of our prophetic call.