

## Go! I Am Sending You

As most of you know by now, these past 6 weeks we have focused on building a disciple-making community. That's our vision as we follow Jesus. We have been giving you, both from the pulpit as well as in class, language that shapes this kind of community, a community of which we have always played a part, but are now making more central. Jesus calls us to be his disciples saying, "Follow me." And then he sends us out saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." That's our call. That's our vision.

Here is some of the language that comes from that vision:

1. The Invitation and Challenge Matrix. We have said that a church in the high invitation/low challenge quadrant is a cozy, consumer church. But if we want to be in the disciple-making quadrant (which is where Jesus called us to be), then the challenge will rise. The invitation is already high in this place; we know and celebrate God's grace – his gifts of salvation, forgiveness, eternal life. We're good at invitation! But the challenge that follows, to make new disciples, may seem high. Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." The challenge *is* high.

2. We've used the language of the 4 V's: Vision, Values, Vehicle and Victory (which is, of course, related to the Vision). Our *vision* is to build a discipling community, bringing the Gospel to the world. Our *values* are unchanged: the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. That's nothing new for us. Our *vehicles* are, like Jesus' parable of the steward, treasures that are both old and new. The old list includes worship, classes, Confirmation, Bible study, prayer. To that standard list we have added some new vehicles: huddles, missional communities and perhaps some others down the line. But these are *vehicles*. And when we lose our vision, then our vehicles become the vision. We must hold fast to our vision and let vehicles be vehicles.

3. We've talked about developing deeper relationships in three areas. Those relationships are with God, the UP relationship; with your community of faith, your IN relationship; and with those outside that community, your OUT relationship. UP, IN and OUT. We follow Jesus' example. He spent time in prayer with his Father. His UP relationship was strong. He invested time with his disciples: that's his IN. And he reached out to the crowds, teaching and healing – his OUT. We too, need to develop strong relationships in all three areas.

4. We have talked about *hearing and doing* God's Word, building our lives on the foundation of God's grace. In the last two weeks you've heard about spiritual disciplines – the frame of your house, so to speak – which include worship, word and prayer. These three particular disciplines correspond to your UP and IN relationships – which must be strong so as to support your OUT relationships.

Today we are going to focus on that OUT relationship. You remember that we began this series by talking about your "lost one." Remember Pr Dan's sermon from Kickoff Sunday? Jesus told three parables in a row about something that was lost: the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son. Notice that God doesn't neglect the 99, but he does go after the lost one. God's *yearning* is for the lost. We need to go OUT. That means going outside of our own community of faith to do that.

Why are we going OUT to seek the lost? Well, as you know, it's because our culture has changed. People are no longer coming IN to seek church as they once did. When this church was built, along with many other Lutheran churches in the 50s and 60s, California was considered a mission field. My dad started a church in southern California in those years; I was the first baby baptized in that church. He and many other pastors did a lot of knocking on doors in those days – at a time when you could usually find someone at home. And often those folks were glad to see a pastor on their doorstep, inviting them to church. They were looking for a church home. (One of the doors my dad knocked on was the Bangsund home, and Jim's parents became members of my dad's new church. And the rest, as they say, is history.)

But times have changed. Today we live in an increasingly secular culture, where more and more families have never been in church. They don't know and don't understand church traditions. More to the point, they are not seeking God; they are not looking for a relationship with him. They are lost from God. And they are the ones God seeks.

Now, we have made some changes around here. And change is hard. We know that. It's hard for us too; it's a work in progress. But the reason for these changes is to provide a place where those who know nothing about church, can come. Where the next generation will feel welcome; where they can find access to faith. But it's not just about our worship practices. It's about a change that happens on the inside.

And perhaps, for us Lutherans, this is the hardest change of all. We need to go OUT to reach the lost. *Going out* feels awkward. Some have asked, "How does a shy person do that? Am I supposed to go out and knock on doors?" So today we're going to talk about *going OUT*. Reaching outside our comfortable faith community, going *out* to make connections for Christ. How did Jesus train his disciples to go out?

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus sends out 72 disciples, 2 by 2, to precede him into the neighboring towns. And he says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." That's what we've been talking about so far. Church attendance is spiraling downward nation-wide; meantime, the beaches, the bike trails, malls and the soccer fields are full on Sunday mornings. And it's not just about church attendance; it goes much deeper. There are many who have no faith at all. The harvest is plentiful. There's no question there. Who, then, are the workers?

Well, that would be you and me. You see, God has always intended that his own people should spread his message to the world, beginning way back with Abraham. We heard it again today from Isaiah: "Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God." From Abraham to Moses to the prophets to the early church, God has made his people the messengers. If God made us to be a royal nation, a kingdom of priests – then who is our congregation? It is the world. God has chosen you and me to be his messengers.

Now, you may be looking around saying, "Who, me?" If so, you aren't alone. Many of God's chosen messengers were reluctant. Moses did not want to go; he said he wasn't a good speaker. Jeremiah protested that he was only a youth. Jonah didn't *want* to help the lost; he ran the opposite direction, and got turned around in the belly of a fish. Perhaps you too, are reluctant. "Lord, don't choose me. I just don't have the gifts. Send my pastor instead!" Well, it doesn't work that way. Because God's presence, his promise and his power are given to each of you as well. In every case, where God had a reluctant messenger, his answer was the same: "I will be with you. I will give you words to speak. I will give you my Holy Spirit to equip and empower you." My friends, like it or not, you are one of the sent ones. But you do not go alone. God goes before you and walks with you. He has your back.

As Jesus sent out the 72, he told them the harvest was plentiful but the workers were few. And then he said, "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." He knows how it feels to us. He understands. But then he gives some very specific instructions. Let's take a look.

He said, look for someone who is "a man of peace." Today in mission-minded circles you will hear a lot about the "person of peace." A person of peace is someone who receives you, receives your message. Someone God has already prepared. This person is ready to serve you. He knows the community to whom you are reaching out – he's an insider. You connect with that person; you develop that relationship.

Lydia was a person of peace. We read that story from the New Testament today. Now Paul was in virgin territory – for the first time, they had set foot on the continent of Europe. They didn't know anyone. Led by God's Spirit, they stopped in Philippi, a Roman colony. Normally they'd go to the synagogue, but apparently there was no Jewish community, so they did the next best thing and headed for a place of prayer they heard about along the river. And although they found "only" women, they sat down and shared with them – Lydia

among them. Lydia's heart was open to the Gospel. She became a believer in Christ and together with her whole household, was baptized. Then she invited Paul and his companions to stay at her home. If you read to the end of the chapter, you find that Lydia's home became a meeting place for other Christians. Hers was the first house church in Europe.

What other biblical persons of peace come to your mind? I think of the widow at Zarephath, who gave Elijah food and water – even during a desperate drought – along with shelter. Or Rahab, a prostitute living inside enemy lines, who gave protection and help to Joshua. Or the Ethiopian eunuch, whom Philip encountered on the road to Gaza. Philip helped him understand Scripture and then baptized him before the eunuch went south to his own country. There are many others. These are people that God had prepared ahead of time, who were ready to hear and receive what the messengers had to say, who became disciples and went on to make more disciples for Christ.

Look for a person of peace, as you go out. Pray for God's guidance; be ready to recognize the person who shows up. Open the conversation and see what happens next. If that person receives your message, take the next step. If not, leave it there. Go on to the next.

You are the messenger. *You* are the one sent to the lost. God provides a way – look for the person of peace. What will you tell them? Jesus said, "Tell them the Kingdom of God is near." It means, the place where God rules. It means, a life where Jesus is Lord. What, exactly, will you say? Here's the answer. *Don't worry about it.* Tell them what your experience is, with God in your life. "I find myself praying more...looking at life differently..." Tell your own story. Answer their questions, best you can. If you are not sure of an answer, just say, "I don't know about that. But what I do know is this...." (And most of the time, it's just what they needed to hear.) Bring them to church. Your job, remember, is simply to prepare the way for the Holy Spirit. He's the one who convicts people of sin, showing them their need for a Savior. He's the one who persuades them of the truth about Jesus. He's the one who brings them to saving faith. It's the Holy Spirit, not you, who will transform their lives.

My friends, as disciples you are automatically messengers. Some people call messengers "missionaries." Now I don't want to put you off – I just want to open up a new way of thinking of yourself. You see, as a missionary, when you go to the grocery store, you are on a mission trip. When you go to work, you are on a mission trip. When you go to school, you are on a mission trip. Jesus said, "Go! I am sending *you*." Are you expecting God to use you? How does that change your day? I bet it will change the way you drive. I bet it will change the way you look at other drivers, even the ones who cut you off. I bet it will change the prayers you offer when you pass by an accident. It will change the way you interact with people throughout your day. See, it's not about you – it's about Jesus. It's about his Kingdom. It's about making new disciples. Being a missionary will change your life.

The harvest is plentiful; the workers are few – and you have been called. Jesus says, "Go! I am sending you" – and he equips you with his Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of Heaven is near – and it starts with Jesus, his cross and resurrection. Keep your eye on the vision – as we become a disciple-making community. There is no greater challenge. There is no greater joy. Amen.