

God's Nature– A Missionary God
“Therefore go into all the world” – Part I
August 23, 2015

⁹ When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

¹² Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. ¹³ These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

¹⁴ Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

¹⁵ He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

¹⁹ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰ Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. Mark 16:9-20 (NIV)

This morning we are beginning a new series that will take us through most of the fall, all the way until Advent, with just a couple of breaks in between. The primary focus of the series is on God's primary calling upon our lives as His people. Neither I nor Alex can take credit for this series. It is based on a series developed by two men, Brad Brisco and Lance Ford, entitled Missional Essentials. We have entitled the series, “Therefore go into all the world,” from our passage this morning from Mark 16.

Last week at Camp Cotubic we concluded looking at *The Great Commission*, Jesus' last words to his disciples as captured by the gospel writer Matthew. Mark and Matthew, as well as Luke and John – though it is not quite as apparent in their endings – contain Jesus' essential command to his disciples: *Go!* God is both a calling God and a sending God. He call us to Himself and then He sends us out to others. God sent His own Son Jesus into the world, then Jesus called men and women to himself, and then he sent them out for others. These are Jesus' last words to his disciples as a group as captured by the gospel writer John (20:21), “*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you.*”

One of the hip words in the church today is the word “missional.” It has been used so much that many are turned off by it. But most are turned off by it because they really don't know what it means and that they fail to understand that God is mostly a missional God. When you hear the word “missionary” what is the first thought that comes to mind? A person going overseas? A foreign country? Maybe Africa?

The word Missionary is defined as “a person undertaking a mission.” That doesn’t help us all that much. We get missionary from the word mission which is defined as “a task or job that someone is given to do.” But in the word “mission” we also get a glimpse of its meaning as God’s people - “the act of sending or being sent.”

The idea of mission can either relate to sending or being sent. The problem within the church throughout most of American history is that we have focused almost exclusively on the idea of sending rather than being sent, so much so that we even find it in the definition of missionary in Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, “a person who is sent to a foreign country to do religious work (such as to convince people to join a religion or to help people who are sick, poor, etc.).” We think primarily of sending and supporting missionaries in faraway places rather than seeing ourselves, both individually and collectively, as being sent. This reality leads us to the first theological essential that must undergird all of our missional (outreach) activity – the understanding that God by his very nature is a missionary God, and we as the church, are his missionary people.

We can try and dismiss that word “missional” all we want, but we need to be very careful, because when we do we are dismissing God and His primary calling upon our lives as His people. Mission is the grand narrative of Scripture. The entire Bible is generated by and all about God’s mission. The word “mission” is from the Latin word *missio*, meaning “sending.” It is the central biblical theme describing God’s activity throughout history to restore and heal creation. While often overlooked, Scripture is full of sending language that speaks to the sending nature of God.

From God’s sending of Abram in Genesis 12 to the sending of the angel in Revelation 22, there are literally hundreds of examples of God as a sending God. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of sending in the Old Testament is found in Isaiah 6. Here we get a glimpse of the sending nature of God.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” Isaiah 6:1-8 (NIV)

Later in the book of Isaiah there is a passage where the prophet recognizes that God's Spirit has anointed him "to proclaim good news to the poor" and sent him to "bind up the brokenhearted."

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,*

² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God,

to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—

*to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a
garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord

for the display of his splendor.

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV)

Actually all those redemptive deeds are dependent on the verb "sent" or the phrase "he has sent me," so the most accurate interpretation of the passage would read like this:

He has sent me, to bind up the broken-hearted.

He has sent me, to proclaim freedom for the captives.

He has sent me, to release from darkness the prisoners.

He has sent me, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God.

He has sent me, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion.

He has sent me, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

It is no coincident that this passage is the passage which Jesus quoted when he began his ministry (Luke 4:18-19). This passage of Scripture became Jesus' personal mission statement.

As true disciples/followers of Jesus, his mission statement becomes our mission statement.

When we move into the church age, sending language is found throughout the Gospels, the book of Acts, and each of the Epistles. The most comprehensive collection of sending language is found in the Gospel of John, where the words "send" or "sent" are used almost sixty times which concludes with that final climactic sending passage, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Therefore, our understanding of the church's mission must flow from our understanding of Jesus' mission.

God is a missionary God who sends a missionary church. While the word "missional" is not found in most dictionaries, it is simply the adjective of the verb "missionary." It's not really the word we're afraid of, it's what the word means that we're afraid of. If God truly is a missionary God who sends a missionary church then missionaries are not just the one's out there, who we send overseas, to places like Africa and China, we too are missionaries who God sends out into our own world – our neighborhoods, our work places, school, our own community and places nearby.

As Brad Brisco & Lance Ford (p. 11) point out in their book *Missional Essentials*, "at the core of the missional conversation is the idea that a genuine missional impulse is a *sending* rather than an attractional one. In other words, we should be sending people in the church out among the people of the world rather than attempting to attract people of the world in among the people of the church."

The church does not exist for the us, the church exists for the world. When we think that the church exists for us then we become mere consumers of religious goods and services such as good worship services, music, children's programs, small groups, etc. We become inward focused instead of outward focused.

In his book *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, contemporary theologian George Hunsberger says that every church needs to have a "Missionary Vision." "A 'Missionary Vision' is one which recognizes that the church is a people **called** and **sent** by God to participate in His mission for the world." The church still gathers together, but the difference is we don't gather for our own sake, we gather for the sake of others, or better yet for the sake of God's mission. We come together as a collective body of believers to be equipped through prayer, worship, fellowship and study in order to be sent out into the world. Just as the church is both called and sent, it is also gathered and scattered. Church is supposed to be the place that we gather on Sunday (or any other day of the week) – to worship together the God who has called us, to be nourished through His Word, for mutual edification, encouragement, fellowship – with the primary purpose of being sent back out into the world.

"The church is the bearer to all the nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God . . . It is not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave, but to call them out in order to send them back as agents of God's kingship."

Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*

Here is where this is most significant today. America is rapidly becoming less and less Christian. It is even faster becoming a nation of unchurched people – many who call themselves "Christians" who see no need to be a part of the church. The gap between Christians who attend church on a regular basis and non-Christians and those who claim to be Christian but do not attend a church is growing wider and wider. Though it was never God's original intention for the church, twenty years ago and beyond, the attractional model of church worked because there wasn't that big of a gap. Twenty years ago if a church goer invited a non-church goer to church, it wouldn't have seemed that unusual for the one invited to say yes, because that is what most people were doing. That is not the case today!

Our primary mission is not in here: to put all our attention, time, money, gifts and talents into what we do here, kind of the *Field of Dreams* approach of "build it and they will come," our mission is out there. Until more and more of us see ourselves as God's missionaries, instead of just those that we send overseas, then the church in America will continue to shrink and have less and less impact on our culture. Interestingly, while we are sending missionaries to place all over the world (and in no way am I saying that is a bad thing), but many from outside our country are looking at America and saying that there is a huge mission field right here.

Here lies the challenge: God calls us together, to be the church united in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and then He sends us out there to be his ambassadors to a lost world. He sends us into the world to proclaim and to live out his kingdom here on earth, to invite others in, to make disciples, all without becoming like the world. That is no easy task. All the time we need to be carefully discerning, are we living out God's kingdom here on earth or are we becoming more like the world?

The apostle Paul (and by the way the word “apostle” literally means sent one), wrote in his letter to the Galatians, “those who are in Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). And a little later, “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). It’s only when we have been crucified with Christ, when we have crucified the passions and desires of our sinful nature, that we can walk among the world and not be influenced by the world.

The two primary alternatives: either retreating into our little church enclaves where church becomes all about ourselves, or becoming more and more like the world where people can’t distinguish between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God, are not alternatives which God gives us as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ.

God is a missionary God, a sending God, who demands a missionary people – not just those who send others out to do His work – but who go out each and every day and do His work in the world outside those doors – in our own community – at home, at work, at play.

Let us Pray:

Lord God, you are a missionary God. A God who has always called a people to **go!** First sending them across the desert from Egypt to Israel, and then from Israel to parts to the north, west, and east, across the seas and then over the oceans around the world, to be a blessing to all people. Forgive us Lord as a church for having lost that sense of mission among ourselves. Renew in us a sense of what it means to be a missionary people in our own community, proclaiming the Good News of your Son, Jesus Christ to everyone including the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve. May we respond with the same words and the same determination as Isaiah- “Here we are Lord, send us!” “Here I am Lord, send me!” In the name of our Savior and Lord Jesus, the one whom you have sent and the one who sends us, we pray, Amen.