

“What Day Is Church?”

John 20:19-28 • Jeremiah 29:4-14

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Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • September 10, 2017

Before we were interrupted by a hurricane a couple of weeks ago, we were nearing the end of our series on what it means to be the church. I thought it might be helpful to review a little. As we learned from Ephesians 4, one of the primary tasks of the church is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Who are those saints? You are. Every time the Bible refers to saints it refers to living, breathing followers of Jesus. So the church exists to equip YOU for ministry. And that ministry is to make disciples of Jesus who then make disciples of Jesus.

The way we are equipped to make disciples can be summed up in three words, three action words: *gather*, *grow*, and *go*. When God saves you, He calls you out of sin into a relationship with Him, but he also calls you into a relationship with His people. In many ways our experience of God depends on our experience with the people of God, which is always kind of messy. But we need each other. Hebrews 10 says, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together.” That’s why we gather. God gathers us out of the world so that we can help each other grow closer to Christ. We gather to worship and to serve and to learn.

So we don’t just gather because we enjoy it. We gather for the purpose of growing in our faith, becoming more like Jesus. Unfortunately as Christians we have settled for much less. We have settled for a comfortable religion of gathering and growing and in the process missing our purpose, which is to “go and make disciples.”

Over and over in the Bible we find that followers of Jesus are sent. When God calls someone in the Bible He then sends them on some kind of mission. He called Abraham to leave and go to a foreign country. He did the same with Jonah and Daniel and Peter and Paul. God sent them in order to bless others. But somewhere along the line we stopped *going*.

Now I’m not blaming anyone for this. It happened slowly over many years. And it affects most of American Christianity. You and I have lived most of our lives in what is called Christendom, where the Christian faith and even the church have been at the center of the culture in Western Civilization for nearly 1,700 years. You certainly can’t deny the influence of the Christian faith on the founding of this country. And until very recently the vast majority of Americans not only identified themselves as Christian but had some connection to a local church.

The result was that most people you knew or met were already Christian or at least *almost* Christian. They thought of themselves as Christian. The church was at the center of our culture. So it seemed there was no one left for us to be sent to. The idea of missions became primarily *foreign* missions, carried out by trained professionals who were super-spiritual.

But God has called each one of us to the mission field. Just before He ascended, Jesus gave His disciples the mission. In Matthew 28 He says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” In Acts 1 Jesus says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And then in today’s reading Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” Jesus is clear that being his follower, his disciple, involves being sent to help seek and save the lost.

This morning we want to look closely at what Jesus means when He says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And so we need to answer two questions in order to see how it applies to our lives. We need to know

why the Father sent Jesus, and then *how* Jesus was sent.

The gospels records three statements by Jesus about why He came. In Mark 10 Jesus says, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” In other words, Jesus came to rescue. He came to rescue sinners like us. In Luke 19 Jesus makes it clearer when He says, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” That was His mission. That’s still the mission of God – to seek and to save the lost. If that’s the mission of God then it’s the mission of the church. Helping to seek and save the lost should be the highest priority of every believer. That’s the *why*.

Now let’s look at the *how*. How did Jesus go about seeking and saving the lost? We should probably do the same thing. In Matthew 11:19 Jesus says, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” Jesus’ method of seeking and saving the lost was to enter into their world—our world—and build friendships. He spent time with people who were far away from God. We tend to avoid those kinds of people. Jesus went out of His way to spend time with them. And He calls us to do the same thing. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” “Go therefore and make disciples.” “You will be my witnesses.”

This was God’s strategy all along. In our reading from Jeremiah 29, God tells the people who have just been sent into exile: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” On one hand their exile is a consequence of their disobedience. But on the other hand, it was part of God’s plan to reach the people in the foreign land.

What does it look like for you to be sent? How does God want to use you to accomplish His mission? The first thing you need to do is accept that God DOES want to send you to help accomplish His mission. When you start thinking of yourself as a missionary you will

begin to see the opportunities that He has given you.

One writer goes so far as to say that God has supernaturally placed 8 to 15 people in your life that He wants to reach through you. Here’s the exciting part. You don’t have to fly half way around the world to go on this mission. These people are already involved in your life. And if they know you’re a Christian, they are already watching you to see if this Christian faith is something they might be interested in. They’re watching to see if it makes a difference in your life. They’re noticing how you treat people and how you handle your money. Is it different from the world?

The first and most important thing for each of us, then, is to be intentional about living our faith. As Michael Frost puts it, we are to live “questionable” lives. What he means is that the way we live our life should arouse curiosity in unbelievers so that they begin to ask questions about your faith.

The second thing you should do is begin to think like a missionary. Jesus was essentially a missionary to a foreign culture. John 1 says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Or as the Message Bible has it, “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.” Missionaries who go into foreign countries first learn the language and the culture and then they move into the neighborhood. They look for ways to connect the Gospel with the culture.

We can do the same thing. Although it struggles to hold on in some areas, the idea of Christendom is ending. 85% of churches in America have either plateaued or are declining. Fewer than half of the people in our area attend a church. In other areas of the country it’s much lower. You are being sent to this culture. Figure out who those 8 to 15 people are in your life that God wants to reach through you. Spend time with people you know who don’t go to church. Find out what’s important to them. And then look for ways to be Jesus to those people.

Let me leave you with four habits that you can develop that will help you in this mission, and you can remember them by the acronym BELL. First, find a way to *ble*ss three people every week. Let at least one of them be someone outside the church. It might be something as simple as sending a handwritten note. Or a small gift. Or serving them in some way. This one habit will go a long way to helping you think like a missionary. Second, *eat* with three people during the week, again one of whom is not a church member. “The Son of

Man came eating and drinking.” There’s just something special about sharing a meal with someone. Third, *listen* to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This means spending time in prayer. The Holy Spirit will show you those 8 to 15 people. Finally, *learn*. This means spending time in God’s Word learning Christ. Spend time reading the Gospels to learn *about* Jesus and to learn *from* Jesus.

We are the sent people of God. So let’s go.

Amen.