

## ***“The Sent of God”***

*Genesis 12:1-7 • John 20:19-23*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 14, 2018

This weekend we saw an answer to prayer. Hopefully you have heard that on Friday a court in Turkey released Evangelical Presbyterian Pastor Andrew Brunson who has been in prison there for the last two years. We have been praying for him and for his family during this terrible ordeal. The Brunsons have been missionaries in Turkey for the last 25 years where he pastored a small Presbyterian congregation in a small town in a predominantly Muslim country. God sent Andrew and Norine Brunson to Turkey in 1993. Their children, two of whom were born in Turkey, grew up there and went to Turkish schools. During the trial one of the things Brunson said over and over is that they love the people of Turkey. And so while he is very glad to be back in the US, it's also difficult leaving the people he has served and loved for half of his life.

All through the Bible we find that God sends people. As we heard earlier God sent Abraham to a far country and said that through him all the families of the earth will be blessed. Of course God's referring to Abraham's future descendent Jesus, but I think there's also a call to Abraham and to all who come after him to be a blessing to others. God sends Moses to speak to Pharaoh and to lead the Israelites to freedom and back to the Promised Land. Each of the books of the Old Testament prophets includes a description of how they were sent by God. For example, God sent Jonah to Ninevah, even though he didn't want to go. In the New Testament, John's gospel introduces John the Baptist by saying, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." Over and over in Scripture, an encounter with God results in being sent.

The most prominent example of being sent is Jesus himself. As 1 John 4:9 says, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God *sent* his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." Just in the Gospel of

John Jesus refers to being sent by the Father 24 times. In John 6:38 Jesus says, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."

The trust is that Jesus is a missionary. He came here, sent by God the Father, to carry out God's mission to the world. That mission is to reverse the effects of the Fall. In Genesis 3 we read that when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit there were consequences. The first consequence is fear. Adam and Eve hide from God because they were afraid. Before they sinned they had no reason to fear. Because of their sin, pain and sickness and death entered the world. Work became difficult. Relationships became difficult. And worst of all they were separated from God, thrown out of paradise.

Much of the rest of the Old Testament tells the story of those consequences. God's chosen people continue in a pattern of sin, rejecting God, being sent by Him into exile, crying out for God's help, and being rescued, only to start the cycle over again. But Jesus came to break that cycle and to actually undo the effects of the Fall. One day Jesus went to his hometown of Nazareth and on the Sabbath went to the synagogue. He was asked to read the Scripture and he read from Isaiah 61, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." That's why Jesus was sent by the Father.

Jesus sends, too. Remember that Jesus is God in person. In Luke 9 Jesus sends out the twelve. "And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal." He sent them out to undo the effects of the Fall.

Then in Luke 10 Jesus sends out 72 disciples in pairs.

In our reading from John 20, following his resurrection Jesus comes to the disciples who were hiding behind locked doors because they were afraid. Jesus says, "Peace be with you," and the disciples were glad. Then he says again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." This is John's version of the Great Commission and it has the same meaning. In Matthew 28 Jesus tells his disciples, "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 other words, the very nature of the church is to be the sent people of God. To be a follower of Jesus is to be sent the same way that the Father sent the Son. We call that the Incarnation. In order to reach us, God became one of us. As the Message translation puts it, "the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood."

Incarnational ministry, being sent by God, basically means taking the church to the people. For us to be sent the way Jesus was sent means that we need to think like missionaries to our own community. When you read the gospels you discover that Jesus spent time with people who were far away from God. He took the time to get to know them. One of his favorite "missionary" activities was to share a meal that stretched late into the evening. We can do the same thing. We should do the same thing.

Alan Hirsch writes that a true encounter with God in Jesus must result in three things: Worship, defined as offering our lives back to God through Jesus; Discipleship, defined as following Jesus and becoming increasingly like

him; and Mission, defined as extending the redemptive purposes of God through the activities of His people. In other words, if we have really encountered Jesus we will be sent out to love and serve people who have not yet really encountered Jesus, helping to undo the effects of sin in their lives. We can only do that by really getting to know people and by including them in our lives.

As you leave here today, think about what it means to be sent by God back into the world. He is sending you to your workplace, to the people you see at the grocery store or the doctor's office. God is sending *you* to be a part of their lives so that *He* can be a part of their lives. Think about who you already know, who you already have a relationship with, that you can be the presence of Jesus in their life.

Now let me leave you with a quote from another missionary that you've probably heard of, Mother Teresa: "Stay where you are. Find your own Calcutta. Find the sick, the suffering, and the lonely, right where you are — in your own homes and in your own families, in homes and in your workplaces and in your schools. You can find Calcutta all over the world, if you have eyes to see. Everywhere, wherever you go, you find people who are unwanted, unloved, uncared for, just rejected by society — completely forgotten, completely left alone."

*Amen.*