

Sent

[John 20:19-23](#)

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Sunday, May 29, 2005

Worship at 8:30, 10, and 11:30 a.m.

In the quiet of this moment may you feel the hand of Jesus touch you and give you peace – to release your fear, that you might hear a word of love and grace that gives you the courage to go. In the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

"The Lord said to Abraham, "Go forth!" In his book on Abraham, Bruce Feiler talks about the importance of that phrase for Christians, Hebrews, and Muslims, and how that primary call of Abraham has impacted the world. God calls individuals as God called Abraham to go forth. To leave our homeland, our comfortable places, our places where our families are and venture into places where we are strangers—we are aliens in a foreign place.

Feiler says that the essence of that call is that Abraham doesn't ask for proof—he is the living proof. The very fact that Abraham responded to the call and was sent proved once and for all that God is alive and present. God speaks and sends people into the world.

Jesus is the embodiment of Abraham's full mission. Jesus was sent by the Father into the world. At that moment in the gospel after the resurrection, Jesus turns to the disciples and sends them into the world. "As the Father has sent me," Jesus says, "so I send you."

At this point in the church year, we don the color green to affirm the mission of the church. Jesus does not leave us inside but sends us outside. Jesus helps us grow and be prepared as disciples so that we might venture out and, as ambassadors, represent Christ in the world. Jesus Christ grows us and grows the church. Abundance comes because of the fruitfulness--the greenness--of Jesus in the midst of the church.

Because of our baptism that we celebrate today and Pentecost that we celebrated two weeks ago, we are sent out to be missionaries in the world. How does Jesus do this? The disciples are in their place of fear. They are closed up; they are locked in. Jesus meets them in their fears. Are you afraid to venture outside of your comfort zone? Are you afraid to take risks and go where you have not ventured before? Jesus meets you in your fears. Most likely Jesus will meet you someplace where you gathered with other people in the name of Christ, and you will receive a sense of call because you have been with that group even while you were afraid to go.

Fear will not stop you if you hear the voice of Jesus say, "As the Father has sent me, I am now sending you." We know we're vulnerable—we know that the world in which we are sent is not necessarily an accepting place. We are sent out to do things that may be counter-cultural, that are not necessarily approved by all recipients who hear the Word of God. But Jesus says, "Go."

And how are we sent? We are sent personally by Jesus. Jesus may speak to you personally in the context of the community. Jesus will say to you "Now that you have followed me and you've declared your allegiance to me, I will prepare you to go." Being a disciple inevitably leads to being a missionary. It doesn't mean that we all go to a Third World country. It means that for most of us our sense of call will take us outside these walls, outside our homes to venture into places in the city and other parts of the United States. But there is one thing assured: if you follow Jesus, Jesus will send you someplace that's unique to your call.

Jesus enters the room unexpectedly; he shows up when we are most afraid. Fear is a normal part of our resistance to do things that are beyond our comfort zone. Fear will not stop you, because Jesus is with you and will send you out. Jesus breaks into the room so you can break out. Jesus shows up as the one who is crucified. Jesus says, "See my hands and my side, I am the one who was beaten...I was the one who was crucified and nailed on the cross...I was the one who died and was buried...I am risen." When we discover that Jesus who died is now risen from the dead, and we are part of the resurrection, it drives us into mission.

Jesus shows up as the one who knows suffering; and Jesus sends us out as people who will experience suffering. Wherever we go, if we are naming good news and forgiveness, there will be people who do not like that message because it works against their pattern of life. Jesus assures us that he will go with us wherever we are sent. The mission of God becomes the mission of Jesus. Jesus sends the apostles into his mission, and the apostles send other disciples into the mission. And so we hear that message today as disciples, people who choose to follow Jesus: that we too are sent into mission.

God sends us out into the world to show the love of God. Jesus sends us out into the world to show the pattern of forgiveness that Jesus demonstrated by dying on the cross for our sins. Jesus shows us the willingness to sacrifice so that we have a model of one who is willing to lay down his life for other people.

This weekend we talk a lot about sacrifice. It seems that Memorial Day for many years has been about remembering people who have sacrificed. Yesterday was the graduation of hundreds of cadets at West Point. This year seven out of ten of those cadets will be sent immediately into harm's way. They will be living sacrifices to do the mission that they are given to do. And so it is on this Memorial Day weekend, we remember those who are willing to lay down their lives in mission on behalf of a higher power.

Mission demands sacrifice. Mission demands that we are willing to lay down our lives for a greater purpose. We are sent out from our comfort zones from the places where we have been trained and prepared in our homes—in our church—in our everyday activities of life, and we are sent into harm's way.

Not too long ago James Bradley, who wrote the book, *Flags of our Fathers*, was at the Iwo Jima Memorial with about a hundred

people from Wisconsin. Bradley, the son of one of the six men who planted that flag on Iwo Jima, spoke about the kind of the sacrifice that they made. Of the two hundred and fifty men that went into battle with his father, only twenty-seven came off that island alive -- a huge sacrifice to accomplish a mission. And the mission, from the perspective from many of them, was to survive. But the bigger mission was to make sure that tyranny and oppression did not rule the world.

That's the mission Jesus Christ gives to us. Don't be afraid, I'm sending you as a living sacrifice so that you will bring a kind of life and perspective so that tyranny and oppression and persecution does not prevail. I want you to bring peace where you go. I want you to bring a sense of shalom and wholeness, helpfulness and healing where you go. I want you to be a person who is at peace even when you are in the midst of people who are struggling in hostility. Don't go out in fear. Go out with the sense that I will be with you in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In a recent conversation with a man nearing the end of his life, I asked what would you have or do over again if you possibly could and he said one thing, "I would have more of a sense of God's presence in my life. I had too many times that I thought I was out there by myself, and God was no where to be found. I hunger for the presence of God as I end my life.

I think we all hunger that no matter where we go God is intimately present with us; that the love of God, the grace of Jesus and the intimate fellowship of the Holy Spirit sustains us. God is with us. That's Emmanuel – Jesus.

How does Jesus send us out as the Father has sent him? He sends us. Jesus is clearly saying, "Don't stay here." Don't build the walls around you so that you stay enclosed in your locked room... or your locked soul... or your locked being. Break out. Go venture into places that are different and foreign. Take my message with you.

The principle of Jewish authority in history is that the person who is sent represents the person who sends them. Jesus sends us. We literally become Jesus when we go out. We become ambassadors of Christ. The Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords is the one who speaks. And we speak those words of forgiveness and kindness when we go.

I was talking with another man in mid-life recently. He said, "You know, I've lived a life where I have worked hard and I've been fairly successful. What I'm looking for now at mid-life is an opportunity to invest in something of significance. I want to know that God has called me to do something. How I do know that?" If we walk with Jesus over a period of time, and we practice our discipleship, there is no doubt that at one moment in time Jesus will give you clarity of your mission. You will be sent. An awful lot of that is stopping at mid-life to listen for the first time. Mid-life is not so much a crisis of identity as it is a crisis of call and purpose. In your mid-life are you listening for the call of God? For Jesus has a mission for you.

This mission, by the way, is not the mission your parents gave you. This mission is not the mission some authority in the world has given you. This mission is not the mission that your boss has given you. We all need to leave home at some point in time and do mission because God has chosen us, not because our parents have sent us. One of the main responsibilities of parents is to raise children and nurture them. Then send them out and let them go. Some parents say, what if they come back? Then send them out again. But don't hold onto them. Affirm that God has given them a mission to go. Their unique preparation of discipleship will speed God's voice to send them out to unique places in the world.

My father hoped that his four sons would take up the mission of his business. All four sons decided that God had called them to do something different. Much to his surprise it was his daughter who bought the business. Of course, the irony is that he never believed women should run businesses like that. God has a different plan and a different mission. But then my father didn't listen to his father either. When his father said, "I want you to stay and work the farm," my dad decided to go California, work for Lockheed, and be a machinist during World War II. He had a different sense of call.

People have asked me, "Why would you ever leave California and go out into other parts of the country?" During my dark moments I asked the same question. But what I always respond is: that it is God's call. God called us to be in Texas. God called us to be in Pennsylvania. God called us to be in Washington, DC. When God calls, we go and take the risk. And for a period of time we are strangers in a foreign land. It is important that we do not hesitate in the midst of our fear to go where God is calling us, because Jesus is with us.

Every child must leave home. It is a parent's job to prepare and disciple them and make sure that they are listening to God and following Jesus Christ in a loving context. Finally, it's God responsibility to call them forth, to send them out. And so God will.

Why are we to go? The accumulative moment of the mission is clearly stated for one purpose. That is: to make sure that forgiveness is understood by the entire world. John wants to make it clear that the core of the message and the mission is about people learning to live in forgiveness. People – go out and forgive their sins. Now that's a little bit more personal when you know that the first part of forgiveness is: I need to forgive people who have upset me or hurt me.

Jesus is saying that forgiveness is the core turnaround point for how the world will to come to know that Jesus is the Christ. For Jesus refused, in his death, to turn and abuse his abusers. He refused to perpetuate the cycle of vindictiveness and vengeance. He said "No" to that and he forgave. Can you imagine a world where people are living in forgiveness and there is no need for hatred, or vengeance, or terrorism? If the world could simply hear that pronouncement of forgiveness as the core mission, then we would see the kingdom of God on earth.

Jesus sends us out to forgive and be forgiven; to venture outside of our comfort zones with people that we don't know. And to go because we are prepared to follow Jesus. And Jesus does not leave us locked up in fear. If you are afraid today, follow Jesus. If you are locked up inside of an unwillingness to venture out, then listen for the call. For Jesus will speak to you and send you. And fear will not run your life.

In Jesus' name, as the Father has sent him, he is sending you. Listen for the call and bring forgiveness to a world that doesn't know how to practice it. Amen.