



See Yourself as Sent

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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Romans 15:12-16

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Two huge ideas leap from this text. First, our God is the God of hope, and second, we have a mission to share that hope with our world. Our God is the God of hope. *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing* [that is, believing in Jesus] *so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit* (Romans 15:13). A few weeks ago, I was in a hotel room in Calgary and when checking my alarm, I glanced at Facebook only to discover that that my college freshman roommate had died. We've known each other nearly all of our lives. Another dear friend was in a head-on collision a month ago and was in the ICU for three weeks. Another friend underwent a critical surgery. I could go on and on and so could you. And it's all about hope. My classmate needs the hope of the resurrection. The family of my friend in the ICU needs hope that he will recover. My friend, after a critical surgery, needs hope that some- how God will make a way where there seems to be no way. What the apostle Paul knew is that ultimately the only true hope we have is trusting in the person and love of Jesus.

Our God is the God of hope, and you and I have been given the gift of receiving that hope as we rely on Jesus. We have also been given the mission of sharing that hope as we share the compassion and good news of Jesus. The apostle Paul had a clear grasp of his life's mission. So he said, *I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a **servant** of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God* (Romans 15:15-16). In countless other places in the New Testament, he not only repeats and reinforces his mission to the people in our world, he is incredibly clear that that his mission is your mission and my mission as followers of Jesus. It's all about offering to others the hope of the compassion and the good news of Jesus.

One of the interesting things about the history of the church through the ages is how the word "mission(s)" has been used. Somewhere along the line it came to mean being sent somewhere else and it came to mean a program of the church. So missions came to mean being sent to Africa or Haiti or the Sudan and so on.

Missions also came to mean a program of the church. So churches had a Christian Education committee and a Stewardship Committee and, of course, a Mission Committee. Mission committees sent money and encouragement to people serving in the field and at times sent members of their own congregation to serve in various places.

Here at VPC, Sue Hamblen, our Director of Missions, and our Missions Team, have been incredibly effective in this kind of mission work. If you were here two weeks ago during our Mission Outreach Festival, you met people from all over the world that we are supporting. It was a thrilling day! Next week is the Crop Walk, a wonderful mission that raises money to end hunger here and around the world. As you know, we are inviting you to attend one of the many cluster groups that are giving feedback to our developing Ignite Campaign that will address some facilities needed in this building, the remaining building debt we have, and how we may address the real needs of people in our own community through a Christian Outreach Center. That center is all about mission. It's all about showing up to the people who live around us with the compassion and good news of Jesus.

So over the years, the term missions came to mean being sent someplace else and it often means a church program. The total number of people directly involved in church mission efforts is typically a small percentage of the total church membership. That is why I appreciate a new word that has surfaced in recent years, the word *missional*. *Missional* means, “All of God’s people sent on God’s mission”—offering the compassion and good news of Jesus. The verb “to send” occurs some sixty times in the Gospel of John. Jesus said, “As the father sent me, so send I you.” That’s *missional*—all of us are to be engaged in the mission of God. So while *missional* could mean sending to a distant place, it primarily means sent with the mission of God, the compassion and good news of Jesus right where you are now!

I love the story Dick Halverson told of the time he was associate pastor of the large Hollywood Presbyterian Church many years

ago. He said, "One day he went to see his dentist, Jimmy Sheetz. Jimmy Sheetz was on the church's Board of Deacons and, with his wife, was president of the Homebuilders Class, which involved some one thousand married couples. He was in church every Sunday and every Wednesday night. Dick says, "I was in Jimmy's dentist chair and he did what dentists do. He filled my mouth and asked me a question. "Dick, I've been asked by the Board of Education of Inglewood to be president of the Board of Education. This will require a great deal of my time. It will mean that I can only come to church Sunday mornings and I will have to give up my work with the Deacons and the Homebuilders. What do you think?"

Dick said, "Well, you know, I was raging inside. What right does the Inglewood Board of Education have to take Jimmy Sheetz out of the Hollywood Church? But because I couldn't speak, I had to listen and God began to speak to me." "How many members are there in the Hollywood Presbyterian Church?" God asked. "About 8000, I said." God said "How many does it take to run the church?" I made a quick estimate and came out with about 750. And God said, "What about the other 7250 members? Are they just to be unemployed for God's work? Wouldn't it be wonderful, Dick, if every Board of Education was headed by a godly person like Jimmy Sheetz?"

Dick said, "As soon as I got out of the chair, I said, Jimmy, take the job". Back at my office I calculated that it would take about 630 people to run the organization of that big church. I then remembered Jesus' prayer that the Father has sent disciples into the world just as He sent Jesus. "That," said Dick, "is when I learned to make a distinction between church work, which is what you do for the organization of the church, and the work of the church, what happens between Sundays—child-rearing, practicing law, dentistry, teaching, as you share the compassion and good news of Jesus."

So we learn that having a mission from God to offer the compassion and good news of Jesus doesn't necessarily mean a

geographical move like being sent to Africa or Asia. It could mean that, of course, but primarily it means being sent where you are to the people and situations in your life and community. So you approach your own life with people eyes—the eyes of Jesus. It means when you see a person or a situation where the compassion and good news of Jesus can offer hope, you have the opportunity to respond the way Isaiah did when he heard God say, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” As Isaiah replied, “Here I am, send me!” Is there any risk to us with this idea of being sent? There is always risk when you are sent by God. That’s why God said to Joshua, “Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).



Have you been following the news stories of the White Helmets of Syria? When a bomb explodes in Syria and everybody is running to get away, the White Helmets are people

who are running to the site of the blast. These are people of incredible courage and compassion and they put their lives on the line every day. There was a story in the news a couple of weeks ago. You saw them dig a small child out of the rubble of a collapsed building, the White Helmet worker weeping for joy. The White Helmets remind me of an ancient group of Christian men and women known as the Parabolani. Their nickname was The Gamblers. They would tend the sick, those who were dying and those in prison knowing full well they were putting their own lives on the line, gambling with their lives that they could make a difference for Jesus. They were people with the mission of offering the compassion and good news of Jesus and you and I have the same mission.

The Parabolani were the gamblers who took risks on their mission for Jesus. What risks do we take? For most of us it is just the risk of effort and fatigue, the risk of embarrassment, the risk of disturbing our own personal peace and affluence and the risk of messing with our busy schedule. Of course, at times, there may be truly serious risks as we pursue this mission of Jesus to offer his compassion and good news. When with your people-eyes, the eyes of Jesus, you see a person or an opportunity where hope is needed, take risk, be strong and of good courage, and cope with your personal cost in order to offer hope to the lost. So the call to mission is the call to leave our comfort zones and to say with Isaiah, "Here I am Lord, send me."

So what motivated the Parabolani to do what they did in spite of the risks? Again and again I come back to this New Testament Greek word *hilaros*. *Hilaros* in the English Bible is translated, "cheerful", as in "God loves a cheerful giver." That's something of an under-translation because *hilaros* is the root of our word hilarious. *Hilaros is the deep-seated joy that leads you to give yourself away.* It's just that *hilaros* concerns way more than money. It's the attitude of a full heart that embraces God's mission to offer the compassion and good news of Jesus at whatever time, money, energy and effort is required and to do it gladly.

One evening, after a planning meeting for a fellowship event, a woman by the name of Marian came up to me. She said, "'Stan, my neighbor and friend came over to my home this morning. She has been going through some really tough times in her marriage and in her health.' She said to me, 'Marian, I see something in your life that gives you strength and vitality and I need it so desperately. Marian, what is it that you have?' Marian said, 'Stan, I know what she is referring to. It's Jesus Christ, but Stan, I just can't talk to her about that. You are my pastor. You can talk about these things. Stan, would you be willing to speak to my friend?'"

To offer the compassion and good news of Jesus Christ may feel risky, and at times may actually be risky. Yet Marian had *hilaros* in her heart, a joyful overflowing love for her neighbor, so I said,

"Marian, your friend has seen the vitality of Jesus in you, she has sensed Christ's presence in you. I could talk with her but wouldn't it be ever so much more personal if you, her friend, spoke simply of your faith out of love for her?" So Marian took the risk and offered the compassion and good news of Jesus to her friend who gladly embraced Jesus. When with your people-eyes of Jesus you see a person or situation in need of the hope of Jesus, will you hear God saying, "Whom shall I send?" and know in your heart of hearts God is talking to you and that God means you. Will you respond with Isaiah, "Here I am. Send me?"

The song, *Here I Am Lord*, by Daniel Schutte, became one of the favorite hymns of the Catholic Church back in the 1980s. It went on to become one of the favorites of the whole church worldwide and is in countless hymnals including our own. The song is a dialogue between our Lord and we who are God's people. It's a song that illustrates the people-eyes of Jesus, that God loves us, sees our pain and sends people on the mission of the compassion and the good news of Jesus. To sing this song is to ask yourself, "Do I hear God saying to me like he said to Isaiah, 'Whom shall I send?' Am I willing to be a Parabolani to those around me?" And your response, "Here I am, send me!"

When we look at this hymn, we note that in each of the three verses we see three things: God sees our pain, God tells us what he is going to do about our pain and God asks whom will he send to offer hope. So in the first verse we see: [God sees our pain] *I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry, All who dwell in, dark and sin,* [What God will do] *My hand will save. I who made the stars and night, I will make the darkness bright,* [Whom will God send?] *Who will bear my light to them, Whom shall I send?* All three verses follow this pattern.

And all three verses end with "Whom shall I send?" The Hebrew word translated, "here I am," is the word *hineni*. When God called Abraham, Abraham replied, "Hineni, here I am." When God called the boy Samuel, Samuel replied, "Hineni, here I am." When God called Isaiah, Isaiah replied "Hineni, here I am, Lord, send me."

God is calling you on the mission of Jesus to take the compassion and good news of Jesus into every life and situation you encounter. Will you allow the hilaros, the hilarious joy of our Lord, to so melt your heart that your time, money, energy, and effort are truly at God's disposal? Are you willing to say, "Hineni, here I am, Lord, send me?" Because if you are, the refrain of the song, "Here I Am, Lord," is for you. "Here I am, Lord, Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, If you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart." Hineni in your home, hineni in your office, hineni in your school, hineni wherever you are! I encourage you to find this song on the Internet and sing with it offering yourself to our Lord, "Here I am, send me."

**Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard you calling in the
night. I will go Lord, If you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.**