



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"So I Send You" (Encounters with Jesus Series)

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Let me share with you how I started out in ministry many years ago. It was summer and I was about 23 years old, just a few months out of college. I was a Christian for about a year and a half at that point and my friend and I (he, too, was from Jersey) went into New York City to hang out.

Before we were Christians we came to the city often because it was in so many ways a great playground for young adults. One could attend rock concerts with the biggest names, Broadway shows; eat fantastic food from every culture. It was great. But I have to admit, before I was a Christian, more than a few times I went into the city to do some really sinful stuff.

But now, as Christians, we had new eyes and the city looked less like a playground and more like a cesspool. You have to understand that New York was not the city you see today. This was during those days when NYC was nicknamed "Crime City."

That night after taking the train back to Jersey we both said that we can curse the darkness or try to light a candle for the Lord in that darkness. We decided that the next time we went into the city we needed to share the gospel of Christ with people.

So the very next day we jumped back on the train to go back into the city to share Christ with New Yorkers and we were going to do it by preaching on the streets.

For us the logical place to start was at St. Patrick's Cathedral on 5th Ave. It's a huge church right across from Rockefeller Center. We figured that since it's a church, God was probably around there somewhere. So why not start there?

Now understand most of my theological and ministry training at this point amounted to memorizing John 3:16 and a few main lines from Gospel tracts we would hand out to people.

So there we were on a bright and warm summer day and all kinds of people were eating their lunch on the steps of this giant cathedral. We had a captive audience. My friend then said, "Are you ready? Okay, you go first!"

I have to admit that it was the one time in my life where my mouth was so dry that my tongue stuck to my mouth and my knees felt weak. In the moments just before I said anything a man started cussing—a lot. It was

bizarre. Nonetheless, I opened my mouth and began to preach.

That day started an entire career in preaching and teaching. Now I know what you are thinking, "Steve, you should have tried a different career."

Kidding aside, I have to admit it wasn't all that pretty when we tried to preach, but on some of the days we went preaching people actually came to Christ.

Now given my background and the kind of person I was, the question is, "How in the world did I get there? And why in the world would I do something so weird?"

Today we conclude our "Encounters with Jesus" series. In doing so, we will look at one of the encounters the followers of Jesus had on the day of His resurrection. It's a great incident that changed the course of the lives of a whole bunch a people that night. Maybe as we look at them it may affect the course of ours.

Let's begin by looking at that room packed with bewildered people, scared out of their minds.

In verse 19 we see that the room is filled with the disciples of Jesus.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.”

Remember that these disciples consisted mostly of people who abandoned and denied Jesus in the worst hour of His life. It is filled with simple folks like fishermen, zealots, former tax collectors, marginalized women, and sinners of all shapes and sizes.

But what that room did *not* contain was trained theologians or rabbis. They were just ordinary people who were now called to do nothing less than change reality. Jesus put it this way in v. 21, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

To us with our 21st century, middle class, suburban eyes, that may sound like a promotion to some sort of full-time ministry. But to them *in that context*, in that day, it probably sounded more like a death sentence.

I really wonder what their faces looked like or what they were thinking when Jesus gave them that charge. Maybe it was like, “Hey, Jesus, we just saw how you were sent. Yeah, sure there were all those good miracles, but there was also all kinds of blood and guts. And personally Jesus, I’m allergic to whippings and crucifixions so I don’t know about this ‘sending’ stuff.”

I know that’s very speculative, but I don’t think I’m too far off with this speculation because of what I see at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. At the very end of Matthew 28 we see another time where the resurrected Jesus gave the commission to carry on His work

to His followers. Many of you know this quite well. Jesus said, “All authority on heaven and earth has been given to Me, therefore, go and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I taught you...etc.”

All this sounds great, inspiring, and maybe even a little daunting, but what I appreciate about all this is the people to whom He gave that big charge. In verses 16 and 17 it says this, “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.”

Notice the audience is the eleven apostles of Christ—the Big Guns (Peter, John, James, etc.). And notice the mindset of at least some of them—doubt! Does anyone live at this same address sometimes, at the corner of Worship and Doubt?

I don’t think this means they doubted that Jesus rose from the dead. I think the issue here is that they had their doubts about how this was all going to turn out. Again, it didn’t go too well at the end for Jesus from a human point of view.

My point in all of this is that the mission of God isn’t given to spiritual superstars.

When I preached in NYC I was full of rough edges and shallow theology. In fact, I was often full of rough edges in those early days.

Once when I had been a Christian about four months, I gave

my testimony to about 50 college students in a campus meeting. As I shared my journey I used language and expressions that, let’s say, most Christian people don’t normally use in a religious talk. In fact, it got people cracking up even though I was being serious.

Decades later if I hear from any of the folks that was in the audience that night, they can recite verbatim some of the words and phrases I used in my talk because it was that startling. But the point is, God didn’t disqualify me even though my way of speaking was less than refined or smooth or eloquent or erudite.

It reminds me of how early on in the Book of Acts when Peter and John were preaching at the temple the religious leaders remarked these words, “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” Acts 4.13

I want to show you something from these words that I found interesting. In the original Greek of the New Testament the word, ‘ordinary’ is ἰδιώτης ‘Idiotes.’ You can see what word in English this looks like? The word meant in those days non-expert, amateur, ordinary. Have any one of you felt like that when you try to do something bold for the Lord?

But these were the very people whom God had called to change the world. They were not necessarily heroic people or spectacularly talented and gifted people or even brave people.

They were people who are afraid to die, who felt really confused, and who were not particularly articulate or well-spoken. Can you guys relate? Can you relate to feeling “ordinary”; to being an “idiotes”?

Now just to be clear as to the mission that Jesus has us on, let me mention a few things.

In verse 21 Jesus says, “*As the Father sent me, so I send you.*” The word “as” indicates a parallelism. In other words, Jesus is making a direct parallel between what the Father sent Jesus to do and what Jesus sends us to do.

There are many thoughts and opinions on this, but let me give you a very broad description of this mission to which we are called.

One theologian, NT Wright, put it this way on the issue of being sent: “What the New Testament really says is God wants you to be a renewed human being helping Him to renew His creation, and His resurrection was the opening bell...Our future beyond death is enormously important, *but ...we’re called, here and now, to be instruments of God’s new creation, the world-put-to-rights, which has already been launched (by the resurrection).*”

First off, let me say that part of his point is this. Since the time of Christ there has been a cosmic renewal going on; renewal in the sense of rebirth, and recreation of life, and the replacement of evil, sin, and death with the life and purposes of Christ. In other words, something new and re-creative broke into Humanity with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And I’m not only talking about how to get to heaven (although that is a central issue). But things happened with Jesus that never happened *before* Jesus and *continued* to happen through His disciples after He left them. Blind people seeing; lame people walking; dead people coming back to life; diseases healed; the marginal embraced; enemies loved.

In other words, more of the Kingdom of God broke into a sinful, hurting, and broken world through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and it *keeps breaking in* to make all things new. Do you believe that this morning?

Let me also say that being a sent person is not necessarily about going anywhere and being a foreign missionary (although that could involve that), but it’s about living as a people sent by God right where we are at.

We are not “sent” in the sense that we send you somewhere *from* Hawaii, but we are sent by God and His kingdom into the very places we live in order to bring about change—to bring God’s intentions for humanity. Have you see those headlines lately? Have you been watching the news? We are called to bring change to that.

Some might think, “I thought making disciples was the main thing?” Yes, it is absolutely central to the mission of Christ. For the sake of clarity let me us say that a disciple is a person who, through the work of the Holy Spirit and the help of mentors and spiritual disciplines, makes intentional efforts to become more like Jesus.

I mention this because reality is, we cannot do what Jesus did unless we are becoming as He is. So if we are not on the path of becoming like Jesus then the mission for us, as an individual, may be a wash.

But the question I want to raise is, *Why* are we to make disciples? Why become more like Jesus? Is it simply to ensure that we don’t mess up until we get to heaven? Is it just to get us to be moral people? No, we get busy on the journey of becoming like Jesus so that the world becomes as Jesus intended.

I emphasize this Renewing and Re-creative aspect of our mission for a lot of reasons—too many to list here. But let me simply mention two.

First, I think this is in part what is being portrayed here when Jesus “breathes on them the Holy Spirit.” In John 20:21-22 it says: “... *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*” *When He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”*

The actions and activity here is reminiscent of Genesis 2:7 when God breathed ‘life’ into Adam. Gen. 2:7 - “...*the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life / the spirit of life, and the man became a living being.*” Because God breathed life into man a new thing happened.

And the “Breath of God” here has the meaning of being a causative agent to bring about change in the condition of something...just like in John 20:22.

In other words, the combination of the resurrection, this new life that occurred that morning, and the “breathing” into the disciples the Holy Spirit of God, portrays a picture of new creation like in the Garden of Eden. The bottom line is that something new is being inaugurated and enacted by Christ breathing on the disciples and imparting the Holy Spirit.

Part of my point here is, Jesus did not give us some “lifeboat mission,” as my friend Brian Fila likes to call it, to live out until Jesus comes back. Jesus doesn’t give us the mission of “get those people drowning in the ocean of sin into the boat and tell them to hang on and stay out of sin until Jesus comes back.”

Our mission is not simply one of rescue, but of rebirth, of recreation, to bring all of creation into its fulfillment as God intended.

Let me put it this way, our mission is to bring God’s purposes, passions, values, and character to bear on our world in real, tangible, and impactful ways.

That is, to bring God’s purposes, passions, values, and character to bear on our soulful pain and separation from God; to bear on the relationships of our lives like family and friends; to bear on the way we do business, politics, education, medicine, engineering, and care for the environment; to bear on the way we look at and deal with the poor, the outsider, the foreigner, the sick, the corrupt, and even the violent; to bear on the way we see and treat our enemies and the way we bring about Christ’s peace in the world.

In other words, the mission is bringing the gospel of God to bear on every aspect of life.

Brothers and sisters, we are not spending the rest of our lives manning lifeboats, but we ride the juggernaut of Christ’s work against the gates of hell. And He will, and we will, not be defeated, but we will be victorious. Something new happened with Jesus and something new continues.

In Revelation 21:5 when Jesus comes in His final glory, He does *not* announce, “Behold, I make all things *like they used to be*.” Rather it says, “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things *new!*’”

And this is key to understand. “Making all things new” does not begin in some future time. It is brought to fullness there, but it doesn’t *begin* there. The making of things new *began* at the resurrection and now that work of newness *continues* right here and right now through you and me and the Holy Spirit. Do you believe that this morning?

Now the second reason is related to the first. I emphasize this issue of Renewal and Recreation in our mission because sometimes we Christians are fond of saying, “We need to get back to.... (fill in the blank).” It’s like we are driving forward into the future by looking into the rearview mirror. It’s almost as if what was meant to be by God has already been. And the best that God wanted to do has already been done.

Sometimes we Christians speak and teach that we need to “get back” to some golden age

when things were “more godly”. With all due respect, when exactly was this golden age in the past?

For example, if you are a black man or woman, when in the past was the golden age? Yes, in the past we prayed in schools. But *while* we prayed in schools we had separate water fountains and bathrooms, we had Jim Crow, we had educational segregation. You get the idea.

And if the age was not golden *for* all then was it really “golden” *at all*?

Brothers and sisters, why do so many of us talk in the past tense? Do we really believe that nothing better awaits our future on earth? Do we not believe that more of the kingdom of God has and will continue to break into our present world?

Look I know it’s easy to be jaded and cynical or even despairing these days. Terror, mass shootings, racial problems, vicious partisan politics are blasted across every news page and program. I get it. There is a lot to work on in the world. But I’m not sure God’s Kingdom comes and His will is done when we only look through the lens of cynicism and despair.

As Christians we, by our very definition, should always see life with hope because we always see life with a Risen Christ who defeated death; because we always see life with the power of the Holy Spirit; because we always see life with the promise of God’s Kingdom come and His will done *on earth* as it is in heaven.

If we truly believe the mission of Jesus, if we truly believe that the Kingdom of God continues to break into our world on a regular basis, then the best days of the church, of our church, of our nation, are not in some imagined glory of the past... but our best days are yet to come. Do you believe that this morning?

Before we finish let me give you some practical ideas through the form of questions that may help us gain clarity in discerning God's missional call on your particular life.

First, let me suggest having a very simple but profound question flowing through our minds as we go about our life: What does the Kingdom of God look like if it were complete and finished in my neighborhood, my city, workplace, in this empty lot, in this stream? How can the Kingdom of God come in this dark alleyway, in this homeless encampment, or to this person, etc.

Why do I put it like this? Because we help the poor not simply because it is a nice thing to do, but we help the poor because when the Kingdom of God is complete, there will be no such thing as poverty.

We don't create just work policies simply because we don't want our workers to get upset. We create just policies because when the kingdom of God is complete there is no such thing as injustice. Get where I'm going with this?

So take time to walk through your neighborhood, walk through your place of work, walk through the parks packed with homeless people with this question swirling around in

your heart and see what the Lord shows you.

Many of you are business leaders. What would be the features of the Kingdom that would end up in your business? What would you try to do? What would a staff meeting look like or sound like with this question in our head? How would it affect the way you do sales or the way you simply listen to a client over lunch?

In Hawaii, for a decent (not fancy) two-bedroom apartment one needs to earn \$31.61/hour. However, the average renter's wage is \$14.49/hour. That leaves a gap of \$17.12. You might think, well, perhaps if two people who made \$15 per hour got together it would be ok. That might work, but what if you are a single mom with two kids? How's this going for you? Would this be a Kingdom of God concern? Is there a Kingdom way to improve this fundamental need for people?

The same holds true for those of you in the medical field, the computer field, the educational field, the engineering field, the "whatever" field. Can we come together and simply brainstorm and pray and encourage one another with this one question guiding your discussion?

Next question is: What excites you? What brings you great joy? Someone once wrote that when our great joy meets the world's great need, we find our mission in life. Sometimes we Christians may feel like serving God is like serving the Wicked Witch of the West. In other words, we will have to do things we don't enjoy. But what if

we take what you are good at, enjoy, or have fun with and imagine using it to serve God?

Let me give you an example of what I mean. My wife loves music and thoroughly enjoys playing the ukulele. In the recent past she had been working part time at Pohai Nani, a community for the elderly.

One of the things she did was to teach such folks how to play the uke. You couldn't believe the outcome. After just ten weeks they put on a concert and invited the residents to attend. Scores of people showed up. But my wife made sure that those who came didn't just passively watch. She got them all singing along with the songs they played on the uke. It was amazing to hear all those voices sing out. My eyes welled up with tears as I watched all the joy oozing out.

But here's the kicker. After the event one woman in her nineties came over to me to share something. She said, "We know the next thing for us is death, but your wife, when she came here, gave us a joy to keep living. She's like sunshine."

That's not a bad outcome for utilizing something you have fun with to serve God.

The next questions are quite the opposite. Consider what sickens and outrages you? What breaks your heart?

Such feelings, when brought to God, may inspire you to do something to change what sickens or breaks your heart.

Seeing human trafficking victims in Thailand and then in Hawaii outraged me, but it led me to help start a nonprofit to combat trafficking. I began doing things I never imagined. I ended up speaking in neighborhood board meetings all over the island informing citizens and leaders about human trafficking in Hawaii. I ended up going before government committee meetings, lobbying state senators and representatives to change laws.

I had no idea when I first prayed about what outraged me where the whole thing would go. I simply started with praying about the things that ticked me off and asked God, "Okay, now what?"

Next question to reflect on: What has been your greatest wound? Think of all the organizations that started, like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and came out of great pain and tragedy.

Writer Robert Bly once wrote, "Where a man's wound is, there his genius will be." Sometimes our great call comes out of our deep hurt. I can't tell you how many classes, seminars, sermons, the planting of a new church came out of the deep pain and wounds of my life.

Now this next one may sound a little odd at first, but hang in there with me. Here it is: For what issue would you go to a meeting at midnight on a Saturday?

If you think about it, you would go to very few things in the face of that great inconvenience to your life. So answering this question helps to tease out the deep interests or burdens or desires of your heart.

Now I don't want you to leave here thinking you have to implement some sort of action worthy of a Nobel Prize. Don't try to jump from A to Z. I just want you to reflect on, "What is my next step? What is my 'B'? And then share it with others and commit to it.

There are so many people in our church who have done this and have gone about doing God's work in our community. I think of Peter Kang who has done so much to bring about the building of that home in Waimanalo. I think of Charlie Alexander and Ron McNichols who spend so much of their retirement time building that home. These guys also help mentor grade school kids who don't have the male mentor in their lives.

There are so many others like Stella Matsuda and Cyndi Teruya and the Shoji family who help out with our ministry to the houseless in Waimanalo through Laundry Love. The folks who help with that are not just cleaning people's clothes, but sharing Christ and serving food and listening to stories and praying for their needs. They are creating hope in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Look let's face it, our world, our culture, our community today cries out for change, for new creation. And where is it going to come from?

It is a time for the mission of Jesus to be reignited in the people of His church. You see, here's the reality. There will never be enough full time or part time ministers and Christian workers to bring about what God intended in this post-resurrection world. There are not

enough ministers and missionaries to bring about spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth, to bring about all the discipleship that needs to get done, to bring about all the justice that needs to be implemented, to bring about the end of racism, starvation, corruption, and poverty, etc.

The mission of Jesus Christ needs you. Will you rise up to that in any small or big way that God may put on your heart? As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends you.

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Note: Sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by emailing: fpchkoolau@gmail.com