

Some of you may recall a couple of years ago; we presented a new vision for CPC: We want to be transformed people, transforming the Peninsula. And to accomplish this, we identified four pillars: worship, spiritual formation, equipping, and cultural engagement. God uses worship and spiritual formation to transform us, and he'll use our being equipped and engaging with our culture to transform the Peninsula.

We've already spent a good deal of time drilling down on the first three pillars. We've done this through sermons, small group studies, worship nights, and 40-day initiatives. Not that we're finished with them! On the contrary, we're still working on them. But today and the next few weeks, we are focusing on the pillar called Cultural Engagement. And by that, we mean our thoughtful and gracious participation in society, as both individuals and as a church community, so people encounter God through our words and our actions. Cultural Engagement means we intend to participate with God in the renewal of the San Francisco Peninsula.

The essence of what we're saying is as God's people, we're on mission. We're not here biding our time until we get to heaven. We've been given something to do. We have a purpose, a mission.

We just finished celebrating Christmas. Christmas is a mission story. It's a story about a dangerous rescue mission undertaken by the God of the universe. We all know how important mission is. Right now, our government and health care community have a mission to get the vaccine out to as many people as possible. There's a sense of urgency in this because hospitals are at capacity, and people are dying. So far, it hasn't gone as well as we hoped. There's been a lot of confusion and miscommunication. Granted, it's a massive undertaking. There are so many challenges and obstacles. But they're still on mission, and they won't stop until the job is done.

I think we all have a sense that as followers of Jesus, we're on a mission, but sometimes we get sidetracked and lose how urgent this mission really is. Perhaps we get overwhelmed by the magnitude of the job. Sometimes we even get confused as to what our mission is.

I want to try to clarify what our mission is and how we're to go about it. I want us to look at a very important incident that took place in the life of Jesus. It's found on John 20:19-23. It took place on the evening of the first Easter Sunday.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." John 20:19-23

Jesus Commissions the Disciples

You can see this took place on the evening of Easter Sunday. That morning, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. She ran back to the upper room where the disciples were hiding and told them, "I have seen the Lord." I'm not sure if they believed her because that evening, they were still hiding behind lock and key, fearful of the Jewish authorities who had killed Jesus. The only two not there were Judas and Thomas. Judas, of course, was gone because he'd betrayed Jesus. But for some reason, Thomas wasn't there either. Perhaps he'd enough of the whole enterprise. He didn't even want to hang out with the others any longer. But the other ten were laying low in the upper room.

All of a sudden, Jesus appears in their midst. He offers them what was a normal and customary greeting in his day, "Peace be with you." And then he shows them his hands and his side—this really is the same Jesus they'd seen crucified. They're besides themselves with joy! Then he says the same thing all over again, "Peace be with you!"

Finally, Jesus says something to them I want to focus on. He says, "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" There it is—mission. And this concept shouldn't have been new to the disciples. Just a few nights before, in the upper room, as they ate their last meal with Jesus before his arrest, Jesus prayed to his Father, "*As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world*" (John 17:18). Here he says the same thing, not to his Father, but to his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

On the one hand, it must have sounded like an impossible mission. I mean, the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world, to pay for our sins and to bring us eternal life. We can't do that. He's absolutely unique in that. We're not saviors. We can't pay for anyone's sins. But that's not what he meant. You see, God's mission has two phases: the first phase was sending Jesus

as God incarnate to die for the sins of the world and inaugurate the kingdom of God. The second phase was sending his people into the world to bear witness to Jesus and all he accomplished. It's one mission with two parts. And what I want you to see here is his mission ("as the Father has sent me") is the model for our mission ("I am sending you."). So let's think together about what that means for us. How does this help us understand our mission in the world?

The motive of our mission is love

Well, first of all, the motive of our mission is love. The whole motive behind Jesus' mission was love. It all started with a Father's love. You know John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" But maybe less familiar to you is Romans 5:8, "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" The greatness of his love is he died not for those who deserved it or were even open to it. No, he died for those in active rebellion against him. His love was such that he died for his enemies.

"*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" This means the motive of our mission is love. The question to ask ourselves is this: Do I love lost people? Do I love people who want nothing to do with God or Jesus or what we call the gospel?

One of the unfortunate things about the culture wars that have been going on in our nation for some time is we tend to vilify those who don't share our values and beliefs. We act as if it's us against them. But he loved us when we were shaking our fist in rebellion against him. I love that about him, but do I love like that? Do the people I know and meet who are far from God know how much I love them? Do I look for ways to show them love? Not just to butter them up so I can share the gospel with them. We don't love people just so they'll accept Jesus. Of course, we want that, but we love them because we've been loved by God unconditionally, and we're called to love others in the same way.

A Trappist monk and writer named Thomas Merton wrote:

Do not be too quick to assume that your enemy is an enemy of God just because he is your enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy precisely because he can find nothing in you that gives glory to God. Perhaps he fears you because he can find nothing in you of God's love and God's kindness and God's patience and mercy and understanding of the weakness of men. Do not be too quick to condemn the man who no longer believes in God. For it is perhaps your own coldness and avarice and mediocrity and materialism and sensuality and selfishness that have killed his faith.

I don't know about you, but for me, that's hard to hear. Folks, we're on a mission, and our motive is love. Just as God loved us while we were his enemies, so we must love our neighbors who are far from Him.

The purpose of our mission is peace

But we also need to ask the question: What was the purpose behind this love? Even though it is unconditional, God's love is purposeful. Jesus' mission wasn't simply to love people; he also came to accomplish something through that love. What if I told you the purpose of his mission was peace? We have some very strong hints of that here in this story. Jesus twice says, "Peace be with you." The fact he says it twice indicates this is more than just an everyday greeting. In fact, earlier, Jesus had promised them peace. He said, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you*" (John 14:27a).

Normally, when we think of peace, we think of inner peace, but I don't believe that's what he's getting at here. When Jesus says, "Peace be with you" on Easter evening, and then shows them his scars from the crucifixion, he's speaking of peace with God, now available to us through the cross. Jesus can say, "*Peace be with you*" because on the cross he said, "*It is finished.*" This is the peace of reconciliation with God now available through the finished work of Christ in paying for our sins.

This is also emphasized down in verse 23, where Jesus says, "*If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*" I know this sounds rather harsh, but what he's talking about here are the effects or results of our sharing the gospel with people. Those who believe our message are forgiven; those who don't are not. Our job is simply to share the good news. He loves you, he died for you, and you can receive complete forgiveness by repenting and believing this message. In fact, John emphasizes this right down in verse 31 of this same chapter. He writes, "*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:31).

Now that's true for individuals, but there is an even grander purpose for which he came. The purpose of this mission goes beyond individual peace with God to the ushering in of the Kingdom of God. In fact, that word peace comes from the Hebrew word shalom, which points to life at it's very best; absolute wholeness and well-being. Because of what Jesus has done through his life, death, and resurrection, we have the hope of shalom, which points to a renewed creation; a new heavens and new earth. Life as it was meant to be. We get a little hint of this as Jesus appears to them in his resurrected body. Notice it was a real body. It was different (renewed) but the same as before. I mean, he still had the scars! This shows us what we have to look forward to.

We look forward to that which is physical. Creation as we know it is fallen, but in the new creation, everything will be renewed, including our bodies. You see, biblical salvation lies not in an escape from this world but in the transformation of this world.

This has huge implications with regard to our purpose. It means that while we care deeply about people getting saved, we also care deeply about peace/shalom in the world we live in. We care

about poverty. We care about stewarding this planet, which God created. We care about our bodies as well as our souls. Someone once asked Martin Luther what he'd do if he knew Jesus was coming back tomorrow. Do you know what he said? He said, "I'd plant a tree." Isn't that great? He'd plant a tree because we do not look forward to floating around in the sky playing harps but to a renewed creation with trees and rivers and lakes and hawks and pizza and friends sitting by fireplaces! And that's why when we talk about cultural engagement, we're not talking just about getting people soul's saved, although that's a very important part of it, we're also talking about making this world a better place to live in, preparing for the fullness of the kingdom to come.

The method of our mission is servanthood

And this leads to the third thing about our mission we learn from this passage, and that's the method. How did Jesus go about this mission? We know he came into this broken world as a man. We call this the incarnation. God took on our humanity, our flesh, and blood. He experienced our frailty, suffering, and even our temptations.

Now he sends us into the world in the same way. Instead of shouting the gospel at people from a distance, there's a sense in which we incarnate the message. We involve ourselves deeply in people's lives. We share life with them. We work with them, laugh with them, share their problems, pains, and worries. We come to them as Jesus did—to serve. Jesus said, "...*the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve...*" (Mark 20:28). Yes, Jesus preached, but he also healed the sick, fed the hungry, washed dirty feet, and even raised the dead. "*As the father has sent me, I am sending you.*" Jesus sends us into this world to serve. The method of our mission is servanthood.

There's a lot of ways followers of Jesus have responded to this pandemic. Some feel that we should resist wearing masks, washing our hands, and staying home. Some pastors believe we should still be able to meet in person, sing, preach, shake hands, and hug one another. We can argue this stuff until we're blue in the face.

The real measure of our obedience to our mission is our willingness to serve others during this time. I'm so proud of the many people of CPC who've served. I love how our middle and high school students have made hygiene bags for people living in shelters and on the street. I love how we've moved 20 veterans off the street and into apartments in the past two months. I love how we stuffed 60 stockings for the veterans at a local VA hospital. I love how we've been providing meals for medical workers. I love how we serve our senior living partners every month by providing worship online. "*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*" He was sent to serve, and so are we.

The power of our mission is the Holy Spirit

The fourth and final thing about our mission has to do with power. Where do we find the power for our mission? Just as reaching millions of people worldwide with the vaccine is a monumental task, so is reaching others with the gospel. Even seeing a single person repent and come to faith is something of a miracle.

I think of my dad, who passed away several years ago. When I became a Christian in my late teens, I tried to witness to my parents. Needless to say, they were very worried about me. They thought I was involved with a cult. I tried to convert them, but it was a disaster. They tried everything to talk me out of my new-found faith. I witnessed to them, prayed for them, invited them to church, gave them Bibles, recruited others to talk to them—I did everything I could possibly imagine. Finally, I just decided to pray and live my life before them as best I could.

A few years later, my mom passed away, and to this day, I'm unsure whether or not she put her trust in Christ. After that, my dad went downhill fast. When he was 69, he entered an alcohol rehab center at Sequoia hospital. It was the third such program he'd been through. His doctor told me this was his last chance; his days were numbered if he didn't get sober. Again, I just prayed and tried to show up.

Then one day, I got a phone call from my brother, who is also a Christian. He said he was talking on the phone with our dad, and right there over the phone, he led my dad to Christ. Honestly, I was a little ticked off that my brother got the honors and not me! I mean, I'm the pastor, and he just sells shoes! But the truth is, neither of us gets the honors. Do you know who gets the honors? Do you know who converts people? It's not you or me; it's the Holy Spirit.

Did you notice what happens after Jesus says, "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you*"? It says this, "*And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*" This is kind of strange because it's not until the book of Acts that the Holy Spirit falls on the church at Pentecost for the very first time. Remember how Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them? How then could the Spirit be given now before Pentecost? This drives scholars nuts! You wouldn't believe how much they've debated about this. But I don't think it's that complicated. This is simply an acted-out parable that points forward to the full gift of the Holy Spirit still to come at Pentecost. If you read the rest of the story, the disciples don't act like men filled with the Holy Spirit after this, but they most certainly do after Pentecost. So the full gift of the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, and this was a symbolic act of what was to come.

But it teaches us that, without the Holy Spirit, we're helpless in our mission. The Holy Spirit is the power of our mission. Later Jesus said to them, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

Our job is to show up and bear witness to him through our words and works and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. The power of our mission is the Holy Spirit.

By the way, this is what was so disturbing about what we saw happen in our nation's capital on Wednesday. There's nothing wrong with peaceful protest, but this was anything but peaceful. There are actually some Christians who think violence is the way to bring change, but it's not. The power to bring change to people's lives and to this world doesn't come from us but from the Spirit. We can trust him to do his work.

Jesus says to you, *"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."* So, let me ask you, are you living as one who's been sent on a mission, or are you just biding your time?

It's interesting; one of the world's most unique sporting events didn't begin as a sporting event. Each year riders and their dogs race more than 1,000 miles through the Alaskan snow from Anchorage to Nome for Iditarod, the famous dogsled race.

But the genesis of the Iditarod was something very serious. In 1925, hundreds of children in Nome, Alaska, had been exposed to diphtheria. Children around the world were dying from this highly contagious disease. The only serum to combat the disease was far away in Anchorage. To get the serum to Nome quickly, teams of riders (known as mushers) and their dogs carried the serum to Nome via a relay. More than 150 dogs and 20 mushers were involved in the heroic efforts, which became known as "The Great Race of Mercy." With passion and intensity, the mushers hurtled the 300,000 units of life-saving serum across the Alaskan countryside, arriving in Nome in only 127 hours—a record that's yet to be broken. Hundreds of lives were saved. Mission accomplished!

While the Iditarod began as an urgent, life-giving mission, it's now just another sporting event. The teams race a similar path, but they're not racing to save lives anymore. I'm afraid the same is often true of churches. If we're not intentional about being on mission, the life-saving mission Jesus sent us on can become much less. As a church, we can gather people and go through the motions of the Christian life but somehow lose sense of the whole purpose for which we've been placed here. The truth is, the race is on, and the stakes are high.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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