

Sent: Like Jesus | November 18, 2018

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"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. Then he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. (John 20.21-22)

Sent: By Jesus

- In November we've been reading this text and discussing the theme of *Sent* - a word at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. We aren't where we are haphazardly or incidentally, says Jesus.
- Last week we discussed being sent *by Jesus*. Dave reflected on the setting of these words in John's Gospel. Jesus' disciples are afraid, locked away in a room, but Jesus comes to get them. He comes to get them, in part, because he intends to send them.
- Dave concluded with a prayer I think is wonderfully appropriate for a Christian to pray: *Jesus, would you come and get me. If I'm locked away, isolated, even afraid, would you come and get me, bringing peace – sending me beyond fear and isolation to be with who you want me to be with.*
- We are sent by Jesus, always remembering that God is where I am, but also where I am not. Where is God taking us? To whom has God given us?
- We are sent *by Jesus*. We are also sent *like Jesus* - that's our discussion today.

Sent: Like Jesus

- As much as we are sent *by Jesus*, we are also sent *like Jesus*; not only do we get our direction and marching orders from Jesus, but we inherit Jesus' example as a kind of pattern.
- Jesus, in one sense, is a kind of choreographer. He knows the steps and the music, he knows how best to move, and our job is to keep our eyes locked on him at the front of the class, paying very close attention, all the while learning how to move as Jesus moves, to step as Jesus steps.

- That's one way of thinking about what it means to "follow Jesus" – we are people not only willing to go *where* God goes, but to go *how* God goes.
- So when we think about what it means to go *how* God goes, to be sent *like* Jesus was sent, a few simple but key words should probably stand out.
- I'd like to suggest that at least three of those words are: *In*, *News*, and *Breath*.

In

- *In* or *among* is where we always find Jesus. St. Luke tells he's born *among* the people in Bethlehem, counted like any other in a Roman census; St. Mark tells us he was crucified *between* two insurrectionists; St. John tells us that after the resurrection Jesus stands *in the middle* of that locked room with the disciples.
- Without sounding too simplistic, "in" is a very important word for anyone who wants to follow Jesus, and yet it can be easily forgotten or even ignored.
- Sometimes, somehow we are very easily convinced that following Jesus or loving God must have something to do with keeping away from people, or just awaiting escape. That it's just me and God, and no one else, and being spiritual or holy has to do with keeping out of earthy realities in order to stay heavenly; that all we need do is keep our hands clean and stay out of the way.
- Keeping away from people would certainly be easier, cleaner, even. But if John is right in telling us that God is love, then love is only possible *in-between*, in relation – so staying sanitary might not be our ultimate goal.
- That's why John's prologue begins with telling us that God, in Jesus, is not removed, but *among*. In, or among is where the rubber meets the road when it comes to love.
- So, being sent doesn't mean standing apart or over. Being sent, also, isn't about dropping something like propaganda fliers over enemy territory.
- Jesus' life reminds us that all territory is God's territory, so this is our territory too. Even who you perceive to be the enemy, says Jesus, is really your neighbour.
- So to be sent *like* Jesus means first to resign ourselves to being "in", not out of the way, because *in* is where we always find God.
- That means that when we find ourselves in uncomfortable spots with people, sometimes murky, painful, sacrificial spots, we needn't be overly anxious, frantically eyeing the exits.

- We can take a breath and remember we're right where a Christian belongs.
- And it's often when we commit to being "in" that the love and grace of God really begins to break through because trust has been established. And real love is only possible when trust defines the relationship.

News

- The second word is that should stand out when we think about being sent *like* Jesus is "news". Jesus himself makes it very clear that he's got a kind of announcement – what we call the "gospel" or "good news".
- The news, in a way, is rather simple: God hasn't forgotten or given up on the world and is restoring what's fallen into disrepair through Jesus' life, death and resurrection.
- That's the announcement Jesus brings – God loves the world and is making reconciliation a reality: God to human beings, human beings one to the other.
- So being sent *like* Jesus was sent, in one sense, has to do with simply being people who are always turning up with *good news*, people who live with that headline written all over their lives: God loves the world, and is making reconciliation and renewal possible in the world.
- *How* to share the news is open to expression, of course, and depends on where we find ourselves, who we are "in" with.
- Learning to turn up with good news means we might need to unlearn how we tend to go about things in general. Very often we're convinced our job (not only as people of faith but people in general) is to either force or fix things – and when we carry an agenda to force or fix we tend to get ourselves into hot water.
- Those are two words we should be cautious with. Jesus didn't force himself on anyone - quite the opposite. And it would be a gross miscalculation to imagine our job as sent people is to fix things. God has done and is doing the fixing, and we're involved in that to some degree, but not always the ways we imagine.
- So being sent like Jesus is sent might mean, I'd suggest, simply waking up each day and reading the headline again, letting the ink rub off all over our hands, and turning up in places with good news written all over our lives.
- Down the hall in our office I have a lot of quotes and words that help me. One of them is a simple question written on a sticky note that reads: *what is the good*

news for today? How does the Good news about God translate into the everyday matters of my life, today?

- *What is the good news for today?* That might be a good question to begin each morning with for ourselves, but also a good question to prayerfully ask for others we turn up to. What is the good news for Kelly; for Thomas; for Janis; for Mark? What is the good news, and how do I embody it for my teammate, my inconvenient co-worker, my friend next door, my children's school teacher?

Breath

- The third word that stands out when we think about being sent *like* Jesus is breath; and it's probably hardest to talk about because it can feel the most abstract.
- We can imagine and experience what it means to be *in the world with good news*, but John tells us that we're only able to do that because of Jesus' breath.
- One of the things St. John is doing in his biography of Jesus is writing a kind of second Genesis. Genesis begins "In the beginning"; John opens with "In the beginning". Through the whole story we hear John drawing on images and themes in Genesis. What God first created has fallen into disrepair, but God is renewing and restoring through Jesus.
- The words in John 20.21-22 are a good example of this. Just like God first breathed life into human beings in Genesis, we now see Jesus' breathing life into his disciples – renewal and power to be who they were made to be.
- Genesis tells us that God blessed the humans and told them to be fruitful and multiply. Here we have Jesus saying a similar kind of thing. Jesus is blessing and breathing life on his disciples so they can carry God's life out into the wider world – a multiplication of renewal and reconciliation.
- So, being aware that Jesus has also breathed on us his followers today means remembering first, we're not alone. It's not as if we're not going where God is not. But second, we're not going under our own steam. That produces some boldness – and it's one of the reasons we see these same disciples saying and doing such boldly Jesus-like things.
- Being sent *like* Jesus, then, is about becoming more open each day to the gift of God's Spirit – welcoming the love and life God breathes to us.

Drawing Together

- Drawing all those three words together then - *In, News, Breath* – we can perhaps ask ourselves a few questions:

Discussion Questions

- o What does *being in* mean today?
(how can I commit to where I am, to who I'm with?)
- o How can I best, most lovingly, share *the news*, display the headline?
- o When am I letting Jesus breathe into me day to day?