

IDENTITY: WE ARE MISSIONARIES

family . missionaries . servants . learners

Questions for Personal Study

Read John 20.19-23. What is the context? What does Jesus say?

“As the Father sent me...” How did the Father send Jesus?

What were distinguishing marks of Jesus’ ministry? See Matt. 4.23-25.

How were Jesus’ healings & miracles signs of restored creation?

Do you see yourself as a part of this Redemptive Story of God? How?

Do you see yourself as “sent” to Spokane as a missionary? How?

Questions for Study in Community

Read Luke 10.1-21 together. What message are they sent to proclaim?

What is the mission the 72 are sent to accomplish?

How does the message & mission relate to Genesis 1.26-28?

Discuss what is meant by a radical call in and a radical sending out.

What activities are implied by our Identity of being Missionaries?

Questions for Staying on Mission

As a Missional Community, how do we embody a “Family on a Mission?”

What Kingdom work could we be about together? Pray about it!

Begin to plan for the weekend of Oct. 4-5, a “Weekend on Mission.”

On Gospel Motivations

According to Jesus in Luke 10.17-20, there is a subtle but serious danger in being radically sent out together. That danger is that we might begin to find our identity in how many converts we make or how much good kingdom work gets done: “even the demons are subject to us!” Jesus has to remind his disciples - and warn us today - that our Identity must be found in an entirely different place. When our identity is found in our accomplishments - even if they benefit others - we are ultimately adding to the corruption of the world because of our mixed motives. Jesus reminds us that our identity must be found in having our “names written in heaven.” The metaphor refers to how significant people in a town would have their names written in the census roles. Jesus is saying we must find our significance and worth in his redeeming sacrifice which, though it blotted his name from heaven, caused ours to be written there.

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Who Are You?

Tonight we’re continuing our series exploring what it means to be a part of the Church and our particular expression of the church, the Vintage Faith Communities. Above all, the goal is to remember who we are as a people originally created in God’s image and now - in Jesus - created anew and restored to relationship with God. **We need to remember The Story of God and what He has done in history for us, come to a firm conviction about who we are because of what He has done, and then dialogue about how we should live in light of what He has done.** This series is about our Identity as God’s people and how we embody that Identity together.

Last week we talked about our first Identity, Family. God has always desired a people - a human family - who would live together in such a way that the world would know what He was like. In Jesus, God has come to the world that he created to finally and completely create this people. The church is the family created by God in Jesus. The church is a community formed by the gospel.

Tonight we are talking about the Identity of Missionaries: *We are sent by God to join him in restoring all things to himself.* The family that God has made in Jesus is a family with a purpose - or mission - in the world.

Sending

When God created humanity, he made them in his image and likeness. He made them to be in intimate friendship with him and to stamp his image on all of creation. This was, as we saw last week, a *radical call in* to fellowship with God. He created them to know him and be with him as his Family so that he could bless them with the abundance of his love and grace.

At the same time, being created in God’s image and likeness was a *radical sending out*. They were to be reflectors of God’s character to the ends of the earth, subduing and having dominion over all creatures. They were to cultivate the riches that God put into creation in order to bring him glory by revealing his majesty, wisdom, and love. They were to live under his benevolent reign as a kingdom of people that perfectly reflected all that God was.

In Genesis 1.28, God sends his people into the creation with this glorious purpose of working with him to build a kingdom that reflects him in every way, from art to politics to architecture and everything in between. Untainted by sin, Adam and Eve were to create the perfect society in which humanity and all of creation flourished. This state of universal flourishing is known as “shalom.”

Deterioration

When Adam and Eve chose rebellion from God, they not only lost their intimate friendship with God but also their kingdom purpose in the world. In their self-absorption and self-reliance, they turned from God and his purposes in the world to themselves and their own purposes in the world. In that sense, then, they took all that God put in the world for their enjoyment and development under his reign, and began to use and abuse it. They tried to find their identity in what God had made - one another, family, race, sexuality, etc. - and in doing so inverted God’s intention. They worshiped the creation and used the creator’s resources to do it, rather than worshiping the Creator and using creation’s resources to do it: “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1.25).

The result of this is that they went out into the world and mass-produced corruption in the world. The systemic and cultural brokenness of our world is nothing more or less than the brokenness of our own hearts writ large. We have vandalized the shalom of creation.

Incarnation

Fortunately, the Story of God doesn’t end with our corruption of the universe. God had a plan and from the moment of the fall began working to redeem all things and bring them back under his gracious and loving reign. He began with Abraham, calling this man and his family *radically in* to Himself and *radically out* into the world, promising to bless and heal the world through him. Throughout the Old Testament we watch as God continuously is calling this family to himself and simultaneously sending them out to be a blessing to the world. But just as Adam and Eve failed, so also this family failed to trust God and bring God’s redemptive blessing to the rest of the world.

But of course this was part of God’s plan, too. Since the brokenness of the world is caused by the amplification of the human heart, God knew that no human could ever be the vehicle to bless and restore the creation. We needed one who could both identify with our brokenness and yet overcome and heal it.

And so, when Jesus shows up on the scene, he comes announcing that the Kingdom is at hand and that through him we can enter again into the intimacy with God intended from the beginning, the radical call into fellowship with God. At the same time, Jesus performed miracles which demonstrated what a healed and redeemed creation would look like, and gave us the radical call out into the world to be agents or ambassadors for His Kingdom. We are restored into relationship with God and also into God’s purposes for the world, and Jesus has now sent his church to demonstrate and proclaim what God is doing: “Just as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20.21).

We Are Missionaries

When we say we are missionaries, we are recognizing that we have been brought into this Grand Story of Redemption. We confess that God is healing the world in Jesus, making all things right and good again. By faith in Jesus, we are *called radically in* to fellowship with God and with one another as a Family and at the same time *sent radically out* to be about the work of bringing the kingdom to bear on our world.

Just as Jesus put on flesh and blood and lived among us, so we are called to live this Identity amongst a particular people in a particular time. We call this “incarnation,” the task of “fleshing this out” in the tangible, messy, and glorious places of our every days lives. We are to do this amongst a particular people with particular stories which we must come to know and love as Jesus has loved us. We cannot be missionaries from a distance or from the safe confines of our church buildings. We are called together to demonstrate and proclaim the good news of the restored kingdom to our neighbors and neighborhoods.

The simple reality is that the church in North America has for too long called its people to be about the mission of church building - bigger buildings and better programs - rather than the messy and difficult work of kingdom building. Jesus’ instructed us to be about the work of the kingdom and let him grow the church. By acknowledging our Identity as Missionaries, we are saying that the work of the kingdom and our role in it is part and parcel with becoming a child of God. In the very same moment that you become a part of the Family of God by faith in Jesus you also become an ambassador of God called to tangible expression of the coming fullness of the kingdom: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2.10). We’re a Family with a Mission!