Sermon - The Last Sunday after the Epiphany, A
The Reverend Dale T. Grandfield
February 26, 2017

Exodus 24:12-18
Psalm 99
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

It’s not a word we like so much anymore, much like the related word *evangelism* because, for many of us in this context, mission has taken on associations with abusive religion: acts of faith that not only seek to persuade and convert but also to acculturate, that is to enforce our culture on someone else. There’s a dark history of missonal behavior in the Church’s closet: the crusading mission to reclaim Jerusalem for Christianity through Holy War in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries; the mission to expel Jews and Muslims from Spain in the high Renaissance; the mission of New England Congregationalists and Virginia Anglicans to Christianize, europeanize, and evict the First Nations peoples who already lived here; the mission of circuit-riding preachers on the frontier who wanted to convert other Christians to their way; and throughout the world: the mission of Anglicanism that colluded Christianity with empire and *Britishness*… the Bible in one hand, and a sword or gun in the other…

No wonder, then, that we shy away from using the word mission. We let it stay safely in the realm of business talk, and opt instead for words that have similar ranges of meaning without the same baggage: outreach or apostleship, for example, words that we use here at St. Paul’s.

Still, today is World Mission Sunday, designated perpetually by resolution of General Convention in 1997, World Mission Sunday; and on page 855 in the Book of Common Prayer the Catechism answers the question: What is the Church’s Mission?; and starting at hymn 528, we have a section of hymns in the Hymnal categorized as The Church’s Mission; and, in fact, The Episcopal Church, our church, for legal purposes is called the *Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society*. Did you know that by being an episcopalian you are a member of a Missionary Society? I bet they got that one over on you.

In 1963 Anglicans from across the world met in congress in Toronto. One of the outcomes of their time together was a statement called *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ*. A big name for a relatively short document; a short document that nevertheless has significant theological impact. The topic is mission. And, speaking into a church in a world at that time that had become used to a model of mission where certain groups claimed it was their mission to go to others; where, for example, the Church of England always saw itself as having a mission to places like Japan or Tanzania. The missional model of the time could be described as benefaction, where churches in countries with prestige gave money and faith to the less fortunate.

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2 Hymns 528-544.
3 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church.
But in 1963 the Toronto Anglican Congress called for the complete re-visioning of the church’s concept of mission. Mutual responsibility. Interdependence. The document says quite clearly: “Mission is not the kindness of the lucky to the unlucky; it is mutual, united obedience to the one God whose mission [the Church] is.”4

Let me say that again: Mission is mutual, united obedience to the one God whose mission the Church is.

The Church is God’s mission and the Church, therefore, in every place is called, in the words of that document “to witness, to obey, and to serve.”5 We are called to talk about, to get on board with, and to be part of God’s mission. And in that calling we need to recognize that because we are not God, we simply do not have everything it takes - mission, therefore, to quote General Convention 1997, “carries us across frontiers and boundaries (geographic, political, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, etc.) to encounter the new and unfamiliar in our own communities and beyond.”6 And it goes on to say “World Mission involves not only sending our own to cross frontiers and boundaries, but also receiving others who have cross such frontiers to reach us.” So it is that mission brings us into contact with people who give to us as much as we give to them.

“It’s more blessed to give than to receive”7 people say, and that’s true. God is calling us to give from our abundance, to give and give and give some more, but God is also calling us to recognize where we lack and to open our arms to receive what others have in abundance that we do not.

As Christians in the United States we do have much to give – often we have significantly more financial and technological resources at our disposal that people in other parts of the world; we have developed medicine and education and science. But think for a moment about the exceptional gifts that we lack and others might offer us: joy in simplicity of life; genuine and vibrant faith; connection with the earth and connection with enduring communities; realization that we aren’t the center of the universe; indeed, in the faces of those who aren’t like us we are given the opportunity to encounter Christ, and they, they might just encounter Christ in us, too. Mutual responsibility and interdependence.

Mission becomes the call to encounter.

As your priest and as one called here to facilitate your activity in mission, I stand here and remind you: you need Christ. You need Christ desperately. Not in the sense that Christ isn’t already yours and you aren’t already Christ’s; but there are still more transfigured faces of the Lord of the Church to gaze upon; we can still get to know our Beloved better… and you, and I, we need the encounter that comes when we are sent from our comfort-zone, and when others come to us from theirs. We need Christ who shows up when we are about God’s mission.

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   http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/toronto_mutual1963.html
5 ibid.
6 Resolution A205, the 72nd General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 1997.
7 Acts 20:35
Today is World Mission Sunday, and I think it’s a good time to reclaim mission. Maybe that looks like finding out more about and getting involved with this parish’s Global Missions; maybe it looks like writing a check, or going somewhere new; maybe it looks so simple as crossing the pew and shaking the hand of someone you’ve never met before. However the Spirit is sending you, you are missionaries: you are people who must seek the encounter, you are people whom God is calling to get on board with God’s plan to fill this whole world with knowledge and love, filled and overflowing, and changed - transfigured.

Other Works Consulted


