



**3rd Advent Sermon
Being sent
17 December 2017
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May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts ever be acceptable to you Our Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

In the first Advent sermon Judith spoke about being open and ready for the 2nd coming of Jesus and to be ready to share the story of Advent with others –

In the 2nd Advent sermon Judith spoke about being gathered as Gods people with the foretelling of Christ by the prophets, and the confidence that God will be the supreme gatherer drawing together all of creation into God's vision of wholeness and newness.

These are all relatively passive activities. We can sit on the bus and absorb this information as we look out the window as life goes on. Today's sermon, however is active mode. We need to get off the bus and act on these important aspects of preparation, that Judith told us about.

We need to act on the instruction that we are being sent into Gods world as workers

Readings: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

In this 3rd Advent Sermon today's readings relate to being sent; actively rejoicing actively praying, bringing good news to the oppressed etc; and proclaiming the light as John the Baptist did.

I am going to discuss being sent under 3 themes:

- The relevance or not of the OT reading in Isaiah 61 to us being sent today
- Being sent is part of our humanness and our spirituality
- Importance of prayerfulness to being sent

Writing in the 8thC BC Isaiah 61 described being instructed by the spirit, *to act* - to proclaim good news to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve with a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

The consequences of such action included joy of the giver over the receiver

As a consequence God promises that he will reward his people, will make an everlasting covenant with them and that others will see that Gods people are blessed by the Lord.”

As a result the writer tells us that: I will delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. And that this is as sure as the soil making the sprout come up and a garden causing seeds to grow.

Well we can say this is OT stuff and doesn't apply now but, we are also like the wandering Israelites, risking ignoring Gods call.

And this theme of God providing a way of righteousness for the Israelites prophesied by Isaiah is consistent of course with the Advent story of the continuing purpose of God and His covenant in the birth of Christ.

Thus, my argument that this principle of God's love and purpose is not only applicable to us *but* if God is consistent then we can expect in principle to claim his promises as a consequence of obedience and action.

This is interesting isn't it. Action by ourselves accepting being sent, to

proclaim good news, support the brokenhearted,
provide freedom and release from darkness of despair and hopelessness,
comfort for all who mourn, and provision for those who grieve

has a result –“ I will delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.”
And such people are blessed by the Lord.

In 1 Peter 2:9 he describes the chosen people of God.

Peter uses language that had been used to describe God's special relationship with Israel.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, a people for His possession,
who proclaim the praises
of the One who called you out of darkness
into His marvellous light.

As Israel was, we—believers, the church—are also a chosen race. Unlike Israel, though, we are not a race in the sense of our ethnicity. We are a spiritual race, in the sense that, in Christ, we share a single spiritual Father.

Christians, together, are a royal priesthood. But in and through Christ, all believers are priests with direct access to our Father. We no longer need the Israelite mediator priests of old

He has made us to declare His praises. That's more than just a natural response to our Father's mercy. Declaring God's greatness is one reason for our very existence. When we praise Him, we fulfil our purpose

<https://www.bibleref.com/1-Peter/2/1-Peter-2-9.html>

Responding to being called, declaring his greatness is part of the essence of our humanness and our psychology.

We want to be useful, to help people, to be supportive and purposeful. People don't continue working after retirement for pocket money alone - generally they want to be useful and giving. God uses our psychological need to be useful in telling how we can channel our energies and as a consequence our psychological and spiritual and mental needs are fulfilled and what happens – our response is that we greatly delight in the Lord and our soul rejoices.

Isn't that your experience?

What things do you truly value in life when you remove the clutter? Giving is of real value and in giving a gift the giver often has greater joy than the receiver.

Thus we can be encouraged, that in being instructed and in being sent we can be confident that in so doing, taking an active role, this is part of what we are, and what we are designed for.

So what is the problem or what is it that holds us back?

Sometimes there is a reticence

But we all have a responsibility to answer Gods call to being sent.

This is an active step or a decision to being prepared and wanting to provide a witness to Gods love through Christ.

This is not a passive activity. You can't just sit on the spiritual bus trip and wave out the window. It requires some action

We also read in Isaiah 6:8

I heard the voice of the Lord saying:

Who should I send?

Who will go?

I said:

Here I am. Send me

The Israelites were Gods chosen people and his chosen race on which to bestow his love. As a consequence God expected allegiance and commanded the Israelites to proclaim his praises. Through Christ Gods love has now been opened to all and equally we could argue we have similar responsibility to proclaim his praises

We are reminded 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 today about the importance of prayer.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

What has this got to do with being sent?

Being thankful, rejoicing and praying -has implications that we are going to be better messengers of the good news.

In Judiths sermon on Gathering in Advent she referred to the recent video on Utube of Bishops Ellie and Justin talking about prayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJaj7L0eJ4o&feature=youtu.be>

Prayer prepares us to be sent and I quote in the main from their utube video.

Being a person of prayer reminds us;

Of our fidelity to Christ and reminds us of Christs way rather than our way

It calls us beyond our humanity and provides an opportunity to be filled with the divine spirit, for Gods spirit to speak to us and transform our lives

Calls us into a deeper way of being human and I would add enables or empowers us for what we have been created for

So what are the difficulties:

We create excuses, "Its not me to provide encouragement to others, Im the one who needs encouraging" ... "I can't do that"

There are lots of different opportunities; not all of us comfortable being street evangelists, not all of us can necessarily front up to persons with needs in lower socioeconomic areas but each of us has a gift which he or she can practise and perfect in the service of God by serving others.

You may say I am not strong enough but in the OT prophets frequently used the same excuse, But God chooses the weak and tells us “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

If you are aware of your weakness, you are also humble and receive grace. Then you become strong in God.

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

We know that in John the Baptist (John 1:6-8 NIV)

He came as a witness to Christ, so that through him all might believe.

John came to proclaim the light. This was the most important thing he had to share.

At the end of the day what do we have to share with others that is lasting.

The most important thing we have to share is the love of God through Christ.

If you were to give someone a gift what would be the greatest gift you could give them.

Your car, all the money on your bank acct. These material gifts might be important but they are not the most important and the greatest gift you could give would be showing them the Love of Christ as that is lasting.

If we accept being sent how do we deal with rejection of people not wanting to hear the message.

We have to be sensitive to where they are and not induce rejection. But our lifestyle can also be a witness. We all have gift(s) that can be utilised whether it is an active step of kindness, understanding or going out to do some purposeful God directed activity. We can praise God for that gift.

So in summary,

- We are called to go or be sent to do God’s work in the world.
- That work depends on aligning ourselves with God’s purpose.
- We are more aligned to that purpose in opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit through prayer.

- A plea, "not me Lord" is not an adequate excuse as we are empowered to be God's servants through acknowledging our weakness.
- Serving God and showing the love of Christ is part of our humanness, and without this we are not truly fulfilled or are missing out on something we were designed for – to glorify God.
- As summarised in the 2nd to last verse of Ecclesiastes:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Have reverence for God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man

What were those commandments? They were action words, "proclaim,.. to bind up, comfort and ..provide"

Finally, What about all the other religions wanting to help others as well and the humanists and the good atheists?

John Stott writes in *The contemporary Christian* (IVP) *The uniqueness of Jesus Christ* (Chpt 18) - he quotes an author.. "To make exclusive claims for our particular tradition is not the best way to love our neighbours as ourselves" JS argues On the contrary it is the very best and highest way to express our neighbour love – if the gospel is true, and if it is, we cannot claim to love our neighbour - if we leave them in ignorance of Christ.

I will end with a short prayer that I say as I get out of bed or as I drive to work. I will make it a corporate prayer.

Lord we pray that you will send us out this day, in the power of your spirit, to work and praise to your glory.

Amen