Made for Mission – Part 3

# We Are Doing His Work

# (Ephesians 4:1-12)

Good morning, welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re in the last week of this series “Made for Mission” and we’ve been talking about how we’ve been called by God to join in his mission to reach the world. Last week we talked about our unity, our oneness with each other on this mission; and today, I want to talk about responding, being committed to doing the work that God has called us to do. This is important, because this mission is so much bigger than we can even comprehend, but God doesn’t expect that you would do it alone. In fact, he expects you to be a team player, because what he did in the lives of twelve followers, 2000 years ago, is the same thing he wants to do in our lives today.

Jesus intends for us to work together in order to achieve success in this mission much like Neil Armstrong, who in 1969 walked on the moon becoming the focus of the entire planet. Even today, his name is most commonly associated with space travel and his statement, “One small step for man…” will never be forgotten. But what’s often forgotten is that the Apollo expedition succeeded because of a committed team of 218,000 people who sacrificed day and night for years to make it happen. Neil Armstrong may have gotten most of the recognition but he would be the first to tell you that it was a team effort and it’s the same for us. It’s the same in the church and on this mission to which we’ve been called; it’s a team effort and no one person can effectively do it alone.

In order for us to do the work that God has called us to do we must work together, but unfortunately this hasn’t been the strategy of many churches. In fact, the most common model in the church today is that they hire a professional or a group of professionals to do the work of the ministry, but that’s not the biblical model. And so, what I’d like to do this morning is to share with you God’s method of doing ministry as recorded in Ephesians chapter 4. The apostle Paul writes to the churches beginning in verse one,

“Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God” (Ephesians 4:1, NLT).

He’s reminding us once again that we’ve been called by God, that we were made for mission, and so, in verse two, the apostle urges us to work together,

“Always being humble and gentle. Being patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. (He says) Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. (And so, he describes our responsibility to serve together with love, peacefully preserving our unity and the spiritual reality of our oneness in Christ, making every effort to keep ourselves united in the Spirit). For there’s one body and one Spirit, just as you’ve been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all” (Ephesians 4:2-6, NLT).

In other words, Paul describes a unity of doctrine, all of us coming together, believing the same thing, and recognizing that we’ve been called to one glorious hope for the future. And so, he’s talking about teamwork, being of one mind, working together on mission, when suddenly in verse seven he transitions from talking about what we have in common, to the variety or the individuality of each Christian.

“However, he says, “God has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say, "When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people” (Ephesians 4:7-8, NLT).

Now, this passage has confused many people through the centuries, but Paul is simply quoting Psalm chapter 68, verse 18, which is a victory song written by King David and he’s describing a military conqueror leading his captives. And so, now in our context, Paul is describing Jesus ascending into heaven and the captives not those who are enemies, but those who were once held captive by sin and who have now been redeemed by Christ. And so, Paul illustrates Jesus as that conquering king ascending to heaven and sharing the spoils of battle with his followers, with those who were once captive to sin. And he tells us that Jesus gives each believer a gift for the team, one spiritual gift, a supernatural God-given ability differing from our natural abilities to be used for the building up of the church in such a way that Jesus is glorified.

Then in verse nine, Paul clarifies the fact that he’s applying this to the man Christ Jesus who is now our risen Savior saying,

“Notice that it says "he ascended." This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself” (Ephesians 4.9-10, NLT).

In other words, Jesus who descended, Jesus who made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, humbling himself and being obedient to death on a cross, is now exalted to the highest place having been given the name that is above every name. This Jesus, Paul says, has manifested himself in all the divine attributes of omnipresence, having filled the entire universe with himself, has called you and empowered you to join him on this greatest of rescue missions.

And so, as we continue in verse 11, we find the theme for this message as the apostle Paul tells us how this is played out, how this is supposed to work in our lives and in the church. And he says,

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility (he says) is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12, NLT).

And so, the Bible says that Christ gave these gifts to the church to do what? Would you say that with me? Christ gave these gifts… “To equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church.” Now, who do you think God’s people might be? Who do you think that would include? Any of you think that God’s people might include you?

Now, if I’ve been called to be pastor and teacher, then it says it’s my responsibility, to equip God’s people; to prepare God’s people to do his work, building up the church. Therefore, if you’re a follower of Christ, then I would hope that you would see yourself as being called to do God’s work. My prayer is that if you’re a believer, that you would know God is calling you to minister to others, to make disciples and build up the church. In fact, it’s just as Jesus said in John chapter 14,

“Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12).

Now, some of you are probably thinking, “Well, I just can’t do that. I don’t know the Bible that well, I get nervous praying with people, and so, how could I do even greater things?” Well, you may not have graduated top of your class or most likely to succeed, but I’ve got a newsflash for you.

Video: Volunteer for Pete’s sake

You see, the good news is that God can still use you. In fact, he’s looking for volunteers, he’s looking for those who will respond to his call, and he actually prefers to use ordinary people just like Pete. And so, my hope is that many of you would see yourselves not as those who’ve been gifted, but as those who have been called by God, set apart to make a difference in this world. The apostle Paul said it this way to the church in Corinth, he said,

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are” (1 Corinthians 1:26-28).

In other words, God called us not because of who we are, but in spite of who we are. He chose the foolish, weak, lowly and despised things to show the world their need and his power. And all throughout the Bible God’s been calling people, not that the phone is ringing, but that he speaks to people, he prompts them, moving them, and leading them to go somewhere, to say something, or to do something. And so, God calls people to do something that he wants to have done and we find three different responses which I believe we’ll all be able to identify with. The first response to God’s call that I’d like you to consider is…

## 1. “I’m not going!”

You may remember, that this was Jonah’s response, the Bible tells us in chapter 1, that he heard God’s call. And verse one says,

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah… "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." (And so, God spoke and Jonah responded, not with words, but with actions. And I’m sure that some of you can relate because I know I certainly can, and many years of my life were spent looking over my shoulder and running as fast as I could in the opposite direction). The Bible says in verse three that… “Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord” (Jonah 1:1-3).

And so, Jonah heard the word of the Lord, but he heard it with the wrong attitude, and thought just maybe it was a multiple-choice answer, that he could take it or leave it. And so, he fled, he ran away from the Lord, and some of you may have had a similar experience. Maybe, you felt prompted to do something, you knew that you were supposed to reach out to someone, to say something, or do something, but you said, “I’m not going.”

As a matter of fact, I’d be willing to bet that most of you at some time or another in your life felt prompted to do something and you thought, “I need to. I’m going to. I should, but not today.” And so, you pulled a Jonah and said, “I’m not going.” The second response we’re going to look at is Moses. Here’s what Moses said, number two,

## 2. “Send someone else.”

Now, you may remember that Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law when the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses was captivated by this strange sight and went closer to investigate. As he neared the bush, God called to him from within the bush and Moses said, “Here I am.” After introductions God told Moses,

“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10).

Now, this was something that Moses would have agreed upon, because he knew the dilemma of his people, he knew of their slavery in Egypt, and so this was surely something that needed to happen. But in verse 11, Moses said to God,

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:11)?

In other words, “You’ve got the wrong guy. I’m not good enough. I’m not talented enough. Surely God, you’re mistaken!” And it’s so easy for us to do this, we make excuses all the time. You know, “They’ve got more time or they’re more gifted.” And Moses said in chapter 4, verse 13,

"O Lord, please send someone else to do it" (Exodus 4:13).

And so, Jonah says, “I’m not going.” Moses says, “Send somebody else.” And next, let’s look at the prophet Isaiah. It’s the year 740 BC, King Uzziah had just died, Isaiah was devastated, his beloved King had died, and the Scripture records that during that time Isaiah received a vision. He saw God in his glory on the throne in heaven, angels worshiping, and he overheard the voice of the Lord saying,

"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8).

Now, before I read you his response, let me tell you what he didn’t say. He didn’t say, “No.” He didn’t say, “Send someone else.” He didn’t even ask, “Where are you sending me?” He didn’t say any of that. He simply trusted God and number three Isaiah said,

## 3. "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8).

You see, Isaiah was committed to the call of God and what he did was basically sign a blank contract, giving God permission to interrupt his life. In other words, Isaiah responded to God, “If you want me to go somewhere, I’ll go. If you want me to say something to somebody, I’ll speak. If you want me to give something away, if you want me to use my time, whatever you need me to do, wherever it is, here I am.”

Now, I’ll guarantee you, when you make yourself available to God, he’s going to interrupt you, prompt you, and move you, because he’s got a lot for you to do. In fact, a friend of mine used to say that God’s looking for fat disciples; he’s looking for people who are faithful, available, and teachable. And he’s inviting us to join him on mission.

Today as we close, my prayer is that each of you would join together with Isaiah saying, “Here am I. Send me!” That you would be committed to God recognizing that it doesn’t matter what it costs, because it’s not about our lives, but it’s about his name, his glory, and his kingdom. You see, we’re going to make a difference when we realize that we are the church and we were made for mission, reaching, connecting, and equipping people to become fully devoted followers of Christ.

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August 18, 2019

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*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, PC Study Bible, Preaching Library, and Sermon Central. Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*