

“A GENTLE TOUCH”

January 11, 2026 Isaiah 42:1-9

There's an old story of the 19th-century British scientist **Thomas Huxley**, who got off a **train** one day at the **Dublin station**. He was late for an important meeting of a scholarly society. Jumping into the nearest cab, he ordered the coachman, **“Drive fast!”**

With a crack of the whip, the horse was off and running, pulling the cab at a furious pace. Huxley called to the driver: **“Do you know where you’re going?”**

The coachman answered with a grin: **“No, I don’t know where we’re going, but I’m driving very fast.”**

I wonder if that's a pretty accurate picture of the way many of us live our days. We are going fast, making money, getting a lot done, the church is busy and we pat ourselves on the back for all our many accomplishments. But where are we really going? What is it that we are trying to achieve? As a people of faith, how is all our motion advancing the **Kingdom of God**? Moving faster doesn't mean we are living life or faith purposefully and better.

The truth is we all need direction. Maybe that is why many people develop their own **personal mission statements**. They want to define their lives and live in a particular way. They want a statement which guides their daily decisions. They desire a driver that gets them out of bed in the morning. In short, they want to live purposefully and focus their energy on what is important to them. Mission statements aren't just for individuals. Most corporations see their value. For instance:

- Our mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. —**Microsoft**.

- The mission of **Southwest Airlines** is dedication to the highest quality of customer service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride and company spirit.
- To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. —**Google**.
- To accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy. —**Tesla**.
- The **American Red Cross** prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.
- To inspire and nurture the human spirit — one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time. —**Starbucks**.

I don't know if these mission statements led to the success of all these companies, but I suspect it was part of the equation. People just seem to work better when they know why they are moving. Clarity of purpose is empowering, unifying, and tactical. **So, what is your why?**

I. WE ARE ON A MISSION FROM GOD

There is an old 1980 movie starring **Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi** called the **Blues Brothers**. It is the tale of recently paroled Jake and his brother Elwood, who set out to raise \$5,000 to prevent the foreclosure of the Roman Catholic orphanage in which they were raised. Their plan is to reunite their old rhythm and blues band and organize a performance to raise the money. The great thing about the movie is it featured musical numbers by legendary singers James Brown, Cab Calloway, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, and John Lee Hooker.

But throughout the chaotic, car chasing, madness, Jake and Elwood repeat the phrase, “**we are on a mission from God**”. For all their irreverence, they are being driven by something, someone bigger than themselves.

As important as a personal mission statement may be there is a difference between that and a **call from God**. The former is something you have to generate from within. It comes from your passion, your talents, and your interests. On the other hand, a call from God comes from outside yourself. It means you are on a mission from God. It means that your own specific call is part of God’s larger mission for the world.

Isaiah declares, “**Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him.**” The servant’s mission is from God and only God. As a people of God, a people who follow Jesus Christ, we are called into this greater mission beyond ourselves. The mistake we make in the church is we aren’t really following Jesus if we aren’t engaging in the mission of Jesus. I believe we have overemphasized a personal relationship with Jesus without doing the work that Jesus was doing. Coming to faith is just the first step. Living into the call of God, the mission of God is the purpose of coming to faith in the first place. We can’t have one without the other. Of course, this begs the question, what is the call and mission of God?

II. THE MISSION OF GOD.

To answer that question we turn to this passage in Isaiah. It is the first of four **Servant Songs**, which describe the servant of the Lord and function as a prophetic foreshadowing of the Messiah. They tell of one chosen by God to carry out the mission of God. And what is that mission? “**...he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in**

the earth, and the coastlands wait for his teaching. I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”

In a word, the mission of the servant is **justice**, specifically, it is compassionate justice, as opposed to punitive justice. The objective is to restore harmony and wholeness and fruitfulness to the world. It is the mission of healing human illness, reform of political oppressive structures, advocacy for those who suffer. It’s a call to be a “**light to the nations**”.

God’s “justice” is always about setting things right, which means setting people right. It’s a mission to open blind eyes, both physically and spiritually; to liberate those who are in the prisons of poverty, illness, greed, guilt, violence and any force that keeps people from living fully as the beloved of God. In short, it’s a mission to embody and live out the new creation, the “new things [God] now declares.”

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry he quotes the **Servant Songs of Isaiah**, specifically in Luke chapter 4. Jesus embraces the Chosen Servant Prophecy as his personal mission statement and lives it out in everything he says and does. He will spend time among the poor, proclaim the good news of God’s kingdom (shorthand for the “new thing” God is doing), open blind eyes in more ways than one, and set people free from slavery to sin and death. The mission of Jesus was restorative, compassionate justice for the world.

For Isaiah’s time period this mission of justice involved bringing the exiled Jews back home to Israel. It was the action of our gathering God to restore

all his lost ones to not only their home but also to their relationship with God's self and a new life.

But notice, Isaiah takes this justice mission to radical new heights – specifically, to **international mission and **saving justice for all**.** This is a giant leap beyond justice for the Jews only. This mission breaks ethnic limitations and bears witness to the largeness of God's grace. This justice of God is for all humanity and creation itself. Now that is a big mission. In order to participate in and achieve this mission we are going to need, as they would say in the computer world, a different operating system.

III. DIFFERENT OPERATING SYSTEM

Shane Claiborne wrote a piece called, **Thy Kingdom Come**. He said this, “What I love about **Mother Teresa** is that her life was her witness. She wasn’t a champion of unborn children because she wore a T-shirt that said “Abortion Is Murder,” but because she welcomed mothers and children. **In essence, she said, “If you can’t raise your child, we’ll do it together.”** That’s the kind of embodiment that comes as we seek to marry our beliefs to our actions. As Brian McLaren says, “It’s not just are we pro-life or pro-choice, but how are we **pro-active?**” Are we willing to take responsibility for our ideologies? In my neighborhood that means we’ve got to care for a 14-year-old girl and her child together.”

A. Those who embrace Compassionate Justice operate by humility rather than as conquering heroes. Isaiah said, “**He will not cry out or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.**” While Jesus spoke the truth boldly to the powers that be, and he certainly wasn’t afraid to turn over a few Temple Tables, most of the time he sought to teach, lead by

example, and gave stories for people to sort things out for themselves. Jesus was compassionate to the sick, grieved with the broken hearted, and restored people to health, to society, and most importantly to God. Jesus did not go around squashing, blaming, and destroying people's doubt. And he certainly didn't raise an army and conquer other countries. Rather he suffered abuse, rejection, poverty, betrayal, and misunderstanding, taking on the pain of the world that others would be stirred to joining him in setting things right. Operating by humility is the way of God's compassionate justice.

B. Secondly, those who embrace Compassionate Justice Operate by Spirit power. Isaiah speaks, “I have put my spirit upon him.” “We are not using the world’s methods of destruction, intimidation, lies, manipulation, deception, or brute force to bring about God’s justice. Those who use these methods are not following Jesus Christ. Besides, we do this work with a greater power, the Holy Spirit. It is God’s spirit working through us **“...who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it.”** With a call always comes the spirit power to carry it out, we need to trust in that spirit and not the ways of the world. We operate from humility and spirit.

III. WHO CARRIES THE DREAMS OF GOD

I don't know if you noticed it, but the prophet never tells us who this servant of compassionate justice is. We aren't given a name. I wonder if this was done on purpose. It could be Israel, could be a ruler, could be the prophet himself, could be Jesus, or could it be you and me? It's no coincidence, that after Jesus calls his first disciples, he immediately begins executing that mission and teaching them how to do the same. **He “went through Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and**

proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and sickness among the people.

Perhaps we should be less concerned with identifying the Servant and more concerned with embracing the call to compassionate justice. What does justice look like to a soon to be mother with no access to health care? What does justice look like to people drowning in loan debt? What does justice look like to seniors who can no longer afford to remain in their paid-off homes? What does justice look like when laws favor the wealthy over the rest of us? How do you tell a young family, sorry but there is no affordable housing? What does justice look like to the immigrant, the mentally challenged, the transgender or anyone else pushed to the sidelines?

To live in the service of justice is to pattern one's life on the nature of God who has a mission to the world. Mother Teresa's message was, "**Calcutta is everywhere, if we only have eyes to see.**" Pray that God would help us see our own Calcutta: the pain, poverty, loneliness and ostracizing that happens all over. Each of us encounters situations that demand both prayer and activism. Pray that God would give us the eyes to see the pain of our neighborhoods and ears to hear the call of the living God. **Amen.**

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, January 11, 2025

Second Scripture Lesson

Isaiah 42:1-9

- 1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
- 2 He will not cry out or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street;
- 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.
- 4 He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his teaching.
- 5 Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:
6 I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,
7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.
8 I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.
9 See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be To God.