

Sermon Text for May 18, 2025

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Exodus 3:13-15, Matthew 21:23-27

“Who sent you?”

For a number of years now I’ve been called by the LS social worker to teach kids how to drive. I take them into the school parking lot and let them drive around and do parallel parking and for the most part it is uneventful. This past week I helped a kid in our youth group and he was an amazing driver, it was obvious that I wasn’t the first person with whom he had driven. But I had one kid who was not so awesome. At one point he got the brake and the accelerator mixed up and we were heading very fast toward one of those light poles that have a whole lot of concrete around them. We missed it, he recovered, and that didn’t stop me from wanting to continue along in helping out these high school kids.

Anyone could have chosen to help these kids out, and they need help, but for some reason those days that I drive them I believe that God has asked me to take part in this work that isn’t life altering or world changing, but it is important and helpful and the kids take away from it more than just learning how to drive better. God often places us as individuals, and as a church, in a unique position to do unique things that not everyone is wanting to do or that not everyone does. We have to pursue those things that he puts before us.

This church has a history lately of pursuing those things that God has placed before it, but it doesn’t have to. There are so many things that we do at this church that we don’t need to do. But because we have felt called by God, even sent by God to do them, we pursue them and we find that God honors that in a whole variety of different ways, ways that we could never predict. Life would be so much easier if we just came to church and went home again, but we feel called by God, even sent by God to do that which he has placed upon our heart to do through this church.

Both of our Scriptures today we see our protagonists, Moses and Jesus, faced with the question of who sent you, which goes to the core of why we do anything around here. We believe because it is God who has called us to do it. We don’t do things because they are economically feasible, because we will grow the church and so let’s take certain actions and stances just to bring people in whether it is of God or not. But the underlying truth for Moses and Jesus is that what they were called to do: set the Israelites free and die on a cross as a political prisoner, was illegal. Moses broke the law by confronting Pharaoh, and Jesus broke the law which is why he was hung on a cross. But they pursued what was before them because they clearly knew that they were sent by God to do exactly that.

What are we willing to do for the kingdom if we know that we are sent by God? To what extent would we be willing to take part in God's kingdom even if we knew that it would not be received by those outside of the kingdom? Let's read and see how Moses and Jesus did it.

READ

Every now and then I think back to my time in the south a few months ago when I went on that Civil Rights tour and certain things stick out to me as I run across Scriptures that I prepare for you. This week especially I was thinking of Rosa Parks that historically most people see her as an innocent seamstress who kinda got caught up in the whole movement without really meaning to. Well, that is furthest from the truth. She was a seamstress, but she was also the local secretary of the NAACP. That chapter had planned what was called an inflection point where someone would be arrested which would spark the bus boycott. They had one woman in mind earlier who was a single mom but because she had a child out of wedlock they felt like she would not represent the movement quite like they wanted and that could be a distraction.

But Rosa Parks was perfectly suited and so the plan went into action. It took planning and coordination to do that which would provide a clear path to what God wanted here on this earth through their work. It took resolve knowing for sure who had sent you. Today we look at the civil rights movement and for the most part we operate from the assumption that the progress made, that people of all races and ethnicities have the same rights and the same opportunities, is what God wants and what is right in our nation as well. That is the assumption that I am starting with.

I would think that as a church we would also be willing to step forward if history ever repeated itself and we were asked to be involved in actions and in opportunities that presented themselves in this day and age that were so clear as the civil rights movement. It is a question that I often ask myself, would I be brave enough to take a step forward as a pastor and lead my church to a place where we took a stand for the kingdom of God which so clearly is demanded from us in Scripture. It is a question that nags at me.

Moses was told clearly by God, a burning bush which, by the way, we rarely see. But he was clearly told by God to go and set the people of Israel free by measures that would have been illegal at the time and which could have clearly gotten him in trouble in the house of Pharaoh. He asks God in our Scripture, but by what authority should I tell the people that I come. I can't just go there on my own authority, because I don't have any. By what authority, God, am I going to go and do something illegal, do something that the authorities of the day and age say you cannot do.

God answers him clearly and in a way that is eye opening to me. God equips him not only with his name: I am, Yahweh, the name above all names, you need to know nothing more than that. But he then lists all of the people, his ancestors, who went before him and trusted in this same God and worked amazing things in the name of God. I am the God of your ancestors, God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Moses knew beyond a shadow of the doubt who was sending him and these people who were listed were those that God had clearly worked in and whom Moses knew from his own history. They were his ancestors, his people, with whom God had been.

As a result of this he was able to persevere through 10 different plagues, many meetings with a recalcitrant Pharaoh where he was humiliated before his court, cast out and ridiculed. That was also the life of our Savior as he time after time came to a head with those in power, especially the religious leaders. Let's look at this Gospel of righteousness.

The church today continues to have a unique position in society and culture in our nation. While we do not have the influence which we used to have, being a pastor today carries a certain weight and authority that being something else might not have. In the same way the church itself as an institution is looked at differently, maybe with more deference and respect, than another business or NGO. It has certain authority which today may come more from its past than its present. Being around for nearly 200 years means something to people, you would expect.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) continues to be a church that requires its clergy to go through a series of pretty rigorous benchmarks in order to be ordained. You have to go to undergraduate, to college, you have to get a 3 years masters, you have to pass all of your ordination exams, you have to pass a psychological evaluation, you have to answer questions orally in front of a Presbytery or a commission in order to be given entrance into a Presbytery. It is rigorous, it is not easy, and maybe that's why the church is set apart and pastors have a clear understanding that after all this it is still God who has sent me to minister to his people.

In Jesus' day the religious authorities had all the power, they decided the laws of the land, they decided matters of business and politics. Their reach and their authority far extended beyond their religious influence. Jesus throughout all of Scripture time after time clashes with those who are in authority, breaking the law time after time on the Sabbath and his interactions with women, and in the laws of purity. There were many reasons why Jesus could have been arrested, but was not because the people really liked him and followed him and the authorities were afraid of him and of the people who followed him.

Today in our Scripture we find him the day after he rode into Jerusalem and the whole crowd was cheering him on along with the thousands of other pilgrims entering Jerusalem. This is the day after he cleans out a section of the temple by driving out the money changers. This is the day after that he heals those in the temple who come to him. It is a bit more quiet now, the crowds have died down, and he is back in the temple with his disciples and other followers who were around him.

Those who were in charge ask Jesus, by what authority do you do these things, you know, drive out money changers and heal the sick, in our own house, in our church, in the temple. Who sent you? They wanted Jesus to say God so that they could end his life because of blaspheme, but Jesus asks them who sent John the Baptist. Keep in mind that John the Baptist was a crowd favorite, even as much as Jesus, and he had been beheaded by the authorities, those asking this question, but those in power.

When Jesus asks this question then the authorities begin to argue among themselves because they realize they need to answer in a way that the path of least resistance is followed. Not what is the right answer, but because they were afraid of the crowd, because they didn't want to anger those gathered, the members of the church, they look to answer in a way that may have not been what God wanted, but what they hoped would rock the boat the least.

We often look for answers and living a church life which provides the path of least resistance. But that is not what we are called to do, we are called to do that which is the right thing to do. Following the path of least resistance in this case left the leaders paralyzed, while doing the right thing can leave you dead. Being sent by God and following God's wishes and desires does not protect you, it can kill you. So they answer, we do not know, there, that shouldn't cause any trouble for anyone. We can go on doing the things we have always done and completely ignore the question.

There is nothing more sad than a church which has a mandate from God, just as Moses did, to provide freedom for the people, and chooses to quench that. The church has the authority to act on behalf of Jesus to bring people to a saving knowledge that would transform the lives of those who come into contact with it. The church has the authority to act in ways that will establish justice and righteousness and set the captives free even if it means standing up to Pharaoh and providing safety and refuge to the foreigner that is being persecuted.

Moses could have told God he wasn't interested, he just wanted to tend his sheep. Jesus could have told the religious leaders of his day, you're right, I'm sorry, I won't do it again. This church doesn't have to go through the trouble of providing a food bank, of supplying funds for

those in need with CIC, opening our campus to a dinner church every single week. Church life would be so much easier if we just came to worship on Sunday and went home every week.

But when God puts an opportunity in front of you, when you are certain that God has sent you for a specific task, well, you better pursue it for it is there where the kingdom of God reveals itself here on earth. As a church sent by God to do the work of God in this day and age we need to be sure that we never pass up an opportunity to pursue his righteousness, even it means stepping on the toes of those in authority who are working against the kingdom. Amen.