

See Yourself as Sent!

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**Sermon Series: From
the Pew to the World**

Matthew 9:35-10:5

*Receive people
eyes. Ask
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your eyes to
what he sees in
the lives of
others.*

We meet Jesus on a missionary journey. As he goes through various towns and villages with the twelve apostle-disciples with him he is preaching the good news about God, and healing the sick that come his way. Huge crowds gather around him, leading to one of the most famous lines in the Bible: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). To be harassed is to be worn down, exhausted, to be so very tired from just coping with life. A lot of us feel harassed this morning. To be helpless is to be thrown down, smashed down by some situation, perhaps an illness or a situation at work or a relationship that has become intensely difficult. Many of us are feeling helpless this morning. The eyes of Jesus see the harassed and the helpless, and his reaction is compassion.

Now, while Jesus is seeing the crowds and having compassion, where are the twelve apostle-disciples? The Scripture isn’t clear about this, but my guess is that since they have been traveling with Jesus on this missionary journey, they are sitting right in front of him, all facing up looking at Jesus. So Jesus sees the crowds, sees they are worn down and thrown down by life, and feeling compassion and, although the Bible doesn’t report this, my theory is that Jesus leans down to his apostle-disciples all sitting there looking him in the face and says to them, “Turn around!” Face out! “The harvest is plentiful [look at all the people!!!] but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers [namely you] into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37-38). He wants them to see the same crowd he sees, wants them to see people who are feeling exhausted from coping with life and knocked down

by tough things in life; he wants them to see the need and feel the compassion he feels. He wants them to see with his eyes for people, his people eyes. So we would say that when Jesus tells us to turn around and face out, the first thing he gives to us is people eyes—the eyes of Jesus to see people the way he sees them.*

When Jesus was walking into the city of Jericho, we read in Luke 19 that he saw Zaccheus up in the tree. “Zaccheus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in the sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see.” Here are all of these people surrounding Jesus who have come to see him and wave to him and Jesus has eyes for Zaccheus. People eyes are the eyes of Jesus that see the person who is standing alone or is lonely and joins them, sees the hurting and helps and comforts them, sees the person struggling and becomes the paraclete, which is the Bible’s word for the person who comes alongside to help. It is easy to only have “buddy eyes” and to only see and speak to and interact with your best buddies. If you have people eyes, you see the people around you through the eyes of Jesus. Receive people eyes. Ask Jesus to open your eyes to what he sees in the lives of others.

A young woman with tears streaming down her face walked out of our sanctuary during a worship service after the Virginia Tech tragedy. An adult arose and followed her and just stood and held her. People eyes. A lady from Germany was waiting in a hotel lobby last week, here to visit her mother’s grave for the first time. She spoke to another person in the lobby of her mixed feelings, and that stranger spoke to her of the psalms that give comfort and then began to talk about Jesus and said if she would like a Bible he would leave it at the desk, and she said, “Oh yes.” People Eyes. A friend called me and offered to fly to New Orleans to help with my mother’s funeral. People eyes. People eyes see

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people through the eyes of Jesus and then follow through. People eyes are the gift of Jesus to the people of Jesus.

First, receive people eyes. Second, believe that God will use you in the life of another person. After Jesus says to them pray the Lord of the harvest sends forth laborers in the harvest, Matthew reports, "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness" (Matthew 10:1). When he gave them authority to minister in his name, he wanted them to believe that God would use them in the lives of other people. The Twelve came to understand as they went out that they were not going in their own strength or brilliance of speech but in the sheer power of God. They came to believe that God would use them in the life of another person, that they would do ministry but the results would be God's. That's a very freeing thing. It simply means you may expect God to work if you will step out and serve people.

The stress of Hurricane Katrina kicked up an already present lung condition in my mother and after two years of decline, she died a couple of weeks ago. Next Saturday, the family will gather at the Ott Family Cemetery two hours north of New Orleans, where everyone from my father to my great-great-great-grandparents are buried. The whole family is gathering, and it will be a very special time as we honor Mom and bear witness to the resurrection. I knew mom's condition was deteriorating a year ago and flew to Phoenix to visit her with one question on my mind, "Does mom know Jesus?" So, I am sitting in mom's living room. The television is on to some sporting event and I want to bring up the subject of Jesus. You have to understand that to my mother I am not the Reverend Doctor E. Stanley Ott, pastor and so on, I am her son and that's it! So talking to my own mom about God made me nervous, and I had to believe that God would use me in her life.

Three times I started to bring up matters of faith and mom interrupted me to say, "Look at that," pointing to some-

thing on the television. I finally said, "Mom, I understand that when you were young you were confirmed in the Episcopal Church, is that right?" "Oh yes," she said, "when I was in junior high school, my father was a general in the air force and was stationed at the War Department in Washington, D.C. during the Second World War. My family did not go to church, but my friend Isabelle Clark's family were members of the St. Alban's Episcopal Church, and she invited me to attend confirmation classes with her where I was confirmed in 1943 by Dr. Warner. My parents were having some marriage problems in those years, and in my senior high years, they sent me to a boarding school in New York, near West Point, the military academy. That's where I began to date West Pointers, which is why, when my dad was later stationed in Europe, I met and dated and fell in love with your father?"

I said, "Really?" I didn't know any of that. I am trying to talk to my mother about Jesus and I am finding out where I came from! So finally, I said, "Mom, when you were confirmed in the Episcopal Church, they would have asked you to profess faith and belief in Jesus, and I am just wondering if you believe in Jesus?" Mom looks at me like I have lost my mind. "Honey, of course I do! I hold Jesus' hand every night and I pray for you children. How do you think I survived Katrina?" Now I was so moved I was unable to speak. Wow, my mother knows Jesus. When she dies, as now she has, she will be with Jesus forever. What would have happened if mom had said, "No, I don't really have a connection with Jesus." Then I would have done my best to lead her to faith. To receive people eyes is to see people through the eyes of Jesus who are worn down, who are thrown and show them compassion. To see people through the eyes of Jesus is to see people who do not know Jesus and offer them a positive word about Jesus—so that in offering the deed of compassion and the word of faith you are trusting God to use you in the life of the other person.

Receive people eyes. Without them, you are blind to the needs of people. With them, you see people as Jesus sees them.

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Second, believe that God will use you in the life of the people you see with Jesus' eyes. Finally, we read in Matthew 10:5 about these twelve Jesus sent out. It wasn't enough to see with the people eyes of Jesus or believe that God would use them; they were to step out and follow through with whatever your people eyes are telling you to do—to speak the word of faith and offer the deed of compassion in the name of Jesus.

The mission of Vienna Presbyterian Church is "Call-Equip-Send." To call people to faith in Jesus—to equip one another to grow as disciples of Jesus—and to send one another to serve Jesus. Being "sent" is deeply imbedded in what it means to be the people of God and in the Bible, because sending is always to ministry, to serve God in some way. To get an idea of the significance of sending to God, the verb "to send" occurs around sixty times in the Gospel according to John. It is clearly a major dimension of the ministry of Jesus, who was sent by God, and who now, in turn, sends us, saying, "As the Father sent me, so send I you." See yourself as sent! God is a sending God who appoints people to various tasks and works with them and through them.

Years ago, the only time you heard the word "send," it was typically used in relation to missionaries who were "sent" to foreign lands. Sending may mean a geographical move. However, in the Bible, sending does not necessarily mean a geographical move, but it virtually always does mean a sending to serve where you are and wherever you go. Whether you teach a Sunday School class, usher or visit a lonely person or encourage a troubled person you meet on a bus or at work or stand up for what is right, you are as surely sent by God as if you moved to the other side of the world.

There is an interesting word that is gaining quite a following among church leaders in our country today. The word is missional. Missional means more than missions or the missions program of a

church. Missional means engaging our world in the mission of God. The whole church is missional. The individual believer is missional. If you receive people eyes, believe that God will use you and see yourself as sent, then you are missional. When Jesus says the following, he is expressing a missional mandate: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:37-38).

One of the people who most helped my spiritual growth in my early years of following Jesus was Dick Halverson, who became the Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. A group of us once gathered with him, and he told us the story of the time he was a young assistant pastor at the very large Hollywood Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles. One day he went to see his dentist, Jimmy Sheetz. Jimmy Sheetz was on the Board of Deacons of the church and was president of the Homebuilders Class, which involved some one thousand young married couples. He was in church every Sunday and every Wednesday night. Dick says, "I was in Jimmy's dentist chair and he did what dentists do. He filled my mouth and asked me a question. 'Dick, I've been asked by the Board of Education of Inglewood to be president of the Board of Education. This will require a great deal of my time. It will mean that I can only come to church Sunday morning and I will have to be relieved of my job in the Deaconate and I will no longer be able to run the Homebuilders class. What do you think?'"

Dick said, "Well, you know, I was raging inside. What right does the Inglewood Board of Education have to take Jimmy Sheetz out of the Hollywood Church? But because I couldn't speak, I had to listen and God began to speak to me. 'How many members are there in the Hollywood Presbyterian Church?' God asked. About 8000, I guessed. [It was a big church]. God said 'How many does it take to run the church?' I made a quick estimate and came out with about 750. And God said, 'What about the other 7250 members? Are they just to be unemployed.

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Wouldn't it be wonderful, Dick, if every Board of Education was headed by a godly person like Jimmy Sheetz?"

Dick said, "As soon as I got out of the chair, I said, Jimmy, take the job." Back at my office, I calculated that if every person could have only one job in the church, it would take about 630 people to run the religious establishment of that big church. I realized I was so jealous of the members of the church that I resented it when the world called them out of church busyness. I then remembered Jesus' prayer that the Father has sent disciples into the world just as He sent Jesus. I would have pulled every member out of the world into church busyness, and then God really rebuked me. I saw that the church was doing its most effective work when it was invisible, scattered, everywhere, the salt of the earth penetrating the earth. This is the real influence and witness of the church, not the things that are visible, but what's happening when the church is scattered and invisible in the world and penetrating all of its organizations and institutions. So, [said Dick], I learned to make a distinction between church work, which is what you do for the establishment and the work of the church, which is what the church is doing between Sundays—child rearing, practicing law, dentistry, teaching, doing the work that honors God."

Halverson concluded by saying, "The maximum impact of the church of Jesus Christ in history in the world is not the impact of great and eloquent preachers, or denominations, or church hierarchies, or even popes, or priests, or cardinals, or all of the programs that the church invented. The maximum impact of the church of Jesus Christ is the influence of the aggregate of believers where they are between Sundays. The measure of the effectiveness of a local church is not when the sanctuary is full on Sunday morning and the programs are in operation. The measure of the effectiveness of the church is what's happening when the sanctuary is empty, the parking lot is empty, and the programs are not in operation, and people are scattered all over a metropolitan

area, penetrating all of the organizations and institutions of that area, because where they are Christ is—in them. You are the church."

Know that in whatever manner you may feel harassed and helpless, worn down or thrown down that our Lord sees you with his people eyes, and is the wonderful paraclete who has come along your side to help. Know that in whatever adventures that face you in the home, market-place and in the church itself are the very adventures in which you are sent on behalf of Jesus Christ. Receive People Eyes–Believe God will use you in the life of another person—See yourself as sent!

* I learned the concept from my friend, Chuck Miller.

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