

Sermon John 13:12-17 | Philosophy of Missions

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

The unit of thought starts at verse 2.

Subject: Are we greater than Jesus?

Compliment: If Jesus wasn’t above serving others, certainly we are not above serving others.

Homiletical Idea:

We should humble ourselves and serve like Jesus.

Introduction

On a Sunday in 2007, I was sitting in the usual pew at Immanuel when Becca Kulah (then Taylor) got up to announce a trip to Haiti. I listened to the announcement, and I had this overwhelming feeling I was supposed to go on that trip. I had never been on a missions trip before. Even though I grew up in the church, my parents never let me go, and by the time I went to college, I hadn’t really thought much about it again. After church, I told Keri I thought I was supposed to go on that trip in April 2008 to Haiti. She said, “okay, then go”, or something like that. So, that April, six of us headed to Haiti for 10 days. I was outside my comfort zone for sure. I had never travelled outside the US, Canada, or Europe at that point. I didn’t know what God had for me or why I was there. But, I felt strongly I was supposed to be there. I think I know well now why I was there, and why I continue to go, but it was not obvious to me at first.

The team was 5 women and me. And, although we were a team, I was left to my own devices frequently. The women had a bedroom and bathroom on the second

floor; I was relegated to the first floor by myself. And, the first night in Haiti, there I am lying in the pitch-black bedroom, which is probably about 90 degrees, when something crawled across my body. At that point I decided having the sheet wrapped around me was not optional no matter the heat. Then an hour or two later, a huge ruckus started in the storage room attached to my bedroom by an adjoining door. So, I did what every courageous man does their first night in a new place when strange loud sounds happen; I pulled the sheet, which had become by security blanket, over my head and hoped morning would come quickly. Well, in the morning, I was questioned. "I must have heard it; why didn't I do something." Apparently, goats had gotten into the storage room and ransacked the whole place. I now had zero credibility with the women who worked at the guest house having just met them for the first time.

The women on the trip with me did medical work the first half of the trip while I did construction projects and surveying around the mission. I would be apart from the group, working with people I never met before and with a major language barrier. Well, the first workday morning I was picked up in an ATV by a man named Destin. I climbed in, looked at him, and in my first Creole words ever spoken to a Haitian man, I said, "Komman ou ye?". He said, "I'm fine man, how are you?" I said, "Wow, your English is really good". He said, "It should be, I'm from Chicago". So, as you can see, my trip was off to a great start.

Skipping ahead to the second half of the trip where we went as a team into several remote villages to visit with people, play with the kids, and share the gospel. We arrive in a village, and a lot of people are gathering around a large tree in the center of the village. The leader from the mission tells me that I am going to share a bible story with the people. Mind you, this is the first I am hearing of this plan. While I am scrambling to come up with something, I hear her tell the translator, "If you don't understand what he says, just make something up". To this day, I have no idea if what I said made sense in English or in Creole.

I'll get back to that trip, and others, later on.

Missions: what is it, why do we do it, and how do we do it. I think that is what a philosophy of missions tries to answer. I have had the privilege in my time on the church plant ministry team, the elder board, and now the missions team, to have

a role in crafting Cornerstone's philosophy of missions. After that first trip to Haiti, I started reading a lot of books about missions work, I enrolled in a seminary program in cross-cultural studies, I travelled back to Haiti more times than I can count at this point, and I have engaged in a variety of cross-cultural relationships in my family, professional life, and missions work. I am not an expert in missions, but I have learned a lot in the last 12-13 years. That knowledge went into crafting the philosophy of missions, and it is what I hope to share with you this morning. I thought about reading through the written philosophy of missions, but decided instead to preach through the topics or themes and leave you to read it on your own. We will email it out for all who are interested.

Let's briefly look at the definition of the word mission. Mission: a specific task with which a person or a group is charged (Meriam Webster)

Missions then I would define as our work in carrying out those tasks with which we as followers of Jesus / children of God have been charged. I have six short points to help us define what we have been charged with:

1. Go and make disciples.
 - a. First, and perhaps most simply, Jesus commanded his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). In verse 20 he tells us to teach them to obey everything he has commanded us.
 - b. Who are you discipling right now? I mean intentionally discipling. If you are discipling someone, great. If not, are there names that come to mind of people behind you in your spiritual walk that you could encourage, teach, and advise?
 - c. Who is discipling you right now? If you don't have someone ahead of you on your spiritual journey mentoring you, are there people you would like to learn from? Are you willing to put in the time? Why not ask them if they are available and willing?
2. Tell people about Jesus.
 - a. If no one tells lost people about Jesus, they cannot know and believe. The Apostle Paul explains this systematically in Romans 10:9-15 as he asks "how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard".

- b. When was the last time you told someone about Jesus? Has it been a while? When was the last time you thought about telling someone about Jesus but chickened out? Maybe that hasn't happened to you, but it has happened to me. What if they reject me, what if they laugh at me?
 - c. In Mathew 10:33 Jesus tells us that if we deny him before our friends he will deny us before his father. Thankfully we see in Scripture that this is not a one and done rule as Peter denies Jesus three times and becomes one of the leaders of the early church. But, certainly we should think about the implications of not telling people about Jesus both for them and for us.
3. Pursue others like God pursues us.
- a. We serve a missionary God. God has been pursuing his people since the fall. Genesis 3:15 foreshadows the gospel promise and throughout the Old Testament one sees a God who pursues the sinful, fallen, and lost people he created. We should also pursue sinful, fallen, and lost people created by God.
 - b. Jesus drives this point home with the trilogy of parables, the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost son.
 - c. Too often in life we write people off; we are not good at following up or pursuing people. We are busy. Or, perhaps we don't care enough. The world has so many problems, and so many people come across our paths, we often get overwhelmed and end up not caring about any of them. If I ask you to think of a lost sheep in your life who comes to mind? Do you have time to pursue that one person?
4. Help those in need.
- a. Christians are exhorted throughout Scripture to love and help everyone, especially those who are less fortunate or forgotten. Proverbs 14:31 tells us, "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God."

- b. Jesus drives this point home with the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 and the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. The parable of the sheep and the goats is a particularly troubling passage for many as the goats claim to have prophesied in his name and cast out demons in his name while Jesus claims he never knew them because they did not take care of the “least of these”, the people around them with who needed food, drink, clothing, visitation, etc.
 - c. Just like the previous point, the needs of the world are overwhelming. We can't figure out how to solve world hunger, provide clean water for everyone, reform the justice or prison system, end racial injustice, parent all of the orphans and foster children around the world, cure diseases, etc. But, what broken part of this world grieves you? If I ask you to think of one thing you would like to help fix, what would it be? Could you help one person? Could you support one organization? Could volunteer one place?
5. Do good.
- a. Whether it is in word or in deed, Scripture is clear that God's people must not avoid their obligation to do good. “If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them” (James 4:17).
 - b. Often, we think doing good is just the deeds, but introducing someone to Jesus Christ is good. In fact, there is no greater thing that can be done for someone.
 - c. There are no spectators in God's Kingdom. We are all called to be on mission for him.
6. Praise God.
- a. Finally, human beings were created to glorify God and to declare his praises. “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter

2:9). The very reason God has given these four special names is that his people would be his witnesses and missionaries to the world.

- b. Do you give God the praise and glory he deserves? It could be the sunrise or sunset, the flowers, the breath in your lungs, or perhaps God has done great things in your life. Certainly, he has as life itself is a miracle. Whatever it is, this is your witness. You have seen firsthand what God has done in your life. Be a witness to others on behalf of God, his existence, his love, his power, his majesty, etc.
- c. Are you ready to share your testimony, your witness, with others?

These six points about what we are to do can be summarized generally in two categories. Missions must be a mixture of meeting physical needs and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Christians are commanded both to help those in need and to make disciples. The foremost need for some is physical help while others live in opulence while remaining in desperate need of a savior. “The needs of the poor – and the rich – go beyond the physical and the psychological. They are spiritual as well. The most effective development plans meet the needs of the whole person.” God wants the love of his children to be attractive to the unbeliever, it is the love, care, and concern for others that is intended to draw others to Christ and open the door for verbalizing the gospel message. Exclaiming love and concern for someone, and telling them that God loves them, will seem very hollow to those who are hungry if the words are not accompanied by food. Likewise, providing for one’s physical needs without sharing the gospel does not demonstrate real love as their most significant need remains neglected. Faith and works are not opposing ideas but two manifestations of the same idea. As James said, “show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds” (James 2:18).

If it wasn’t clear in the unpacking of the six points, all of us who claim to be followers of Jesus, Christians, Children of God; we are supposed to be on mission for him. As I said before, there are no spectators in God’s Kingdom. This is why we partner with the Vere Institute and talk about our frontlines. We are all called to have an impact for God in our family, neighborhood, work place, school, sports team, etc.

We need now to expand on the how portion of the philosophy of missions. To paraphrase John Stott, whether sharing Jesus with people in words or in deeds, it

must be done in humility. When God spoke to us in Scripture he used human language, and when he spoke to us in Christ he assumed human flesh. In order to reveal himself, he both emptied and humbled himself. That is the model of evangelism which the Bible supplies. There is self-emptying and self-humbling in all authentic evangelism; without it we contradict the gospel and misrepresent the Christ we proclaim.

God stepped out of heaven, took on flesh, and came to meet us in our mess. This is the beauty of God's mission that we called to share in. Jesus humbled himself, suffered, and endured a brutal death. But more than just that, in order to reach us, he became like us. He associated with sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, and others of ill repute. Jesus didn't stop there. He made friends with these people; he loved these people. And, this isn't speculation, this is Scripture. And, this is why I chose the Scripture reading where Jesus washes the disciples' feet. Jesus went one step further and served his disciples and friends. He served them in a way that clearly let them know he did not consider himself to be better than them. And, he told them this was an example for them to follow. When Jesus says, "no servant is greater than their master", he is speaking directly to the disciples, and us today, saying, if I can humble myself as I did, surely you can. If I, Jesus, who has every right to declare I am better than you, above you, did not do so, but in fact considered others more important than myself, surely you can do that too.

So, when we want to help someone or share with someone, let's approach with humility and emptiness. Let's try to meet them where they are and join them in their mess. People do not need to clean themselves up before they come to God, but sometimes we make them feel that way. Instead, God wants us to do what Jesus did and make friends with people, love those people, and then serve those people. People need friends, they need love, and they need help. All people.

Conclusion:

So, that first trip to Haiti didn't go too well from the perspective of my pride. But, I made friends on that trip that I have to this day. People like Destin that I try to seek out each time I am in Haiti. People I have grown to love. And, people I have had the opportunity to serve. Becca went off to Mercy Ships after that 2008 trip and she told me God told her I would lead the next trip. I wasn't sure then Becca was right, but it turns out she was. I lead a trip in 2009, and I haven't stopped yet.

In 2013, Keri and I took the whole family to Haiti, which at the time included five kids. This trip the Mission of Hope took us to Emmanuel Orphanage in Titanyen, and I met Yvon and the kids in the orphanage for the first time. Yvon told me God had brought us there to help the orphanage, not just that week, but in an ongoing relationship. I wasn't sure at the time that Yvon was right, but it turns out he was. The relationship with Emmanuel Orphanage grew each year and allowed us to host Chabenta for her heart surgery at Boston Children's Hospital last fall. We thought the trip in 2013 was a one-week thing; God had long-term plans. We thought the heart surgery hosting was a six-week thing; God has had other plans.

Over the years, I have learned a lot, adjusted the ways we do things, and still have a lot to learn. People question why we go to Haiti. Wouldn't it be better to send \$10,000 dollars then have 10 people spend a week in Haiti? I think the answer is that sending money is good but visiting is important too. Yvon, his family, the workers, and the kids need money, but they also need friends, they need love, they need to see people who have more in a worldly or material sense, put that aside, meet them where they are, join them in their situation, and demonstrate that they are willing not only to call them friends and love them, but to serve them.

No matter who you are, you are not better than the person around you in need of physical or spiritual help. I don't care what they have done, or what you have done. And, I would go so far as to say you cannot truly carry out the mission of God until you are able to humble yourself and empty yourself. To paraphrase John Stott again, there is self-emptying and self-humbling in all authentic evangelism; without it we contradict the gospel and misrepresent the Christ we proclaim.

We should humble ourselves and serve like Jesus.

Cornerstone seeks to have a well-rounded missions program that is diverse geographically, focuses on both spiritual and physical needs, and is true to the nature of our missionary God. We want the people of Cornerstone to be on mission for God in a well-rounded way too as you work to be on mission in each of the six ways outlined today, and perhaps others you see in Scripture. As Henry Blackaby is famous for saying, "watch to see where God is working and join him." Although you can certainly be creative, you do not need to invent ways to help

people. There are many great local, regional, national, and global organizations with whom you can partner. But, let me remind you of simple things you can do right in your frontline:

1. Disciple someone or be discipled
2. Tell someone about Jesus
3. Pursue relationship with someone
4. Help someone in need
5. Do good
6. Praise God

Prayer.

Benediction: 1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”