

July 8/9, 2018
Rev. Scott Shreve

Sent Forth In Mission

St. Paul UMC, Omaha
II Corinthians 12:2-10

At the end of our worship service we will commission our youth and their sponsors for a week of mission work in Chicago. They will depart right after worship, arrive at Euclid Avenue United Methodist Church in Oak Park this evening, jump on the elevated train each morning this coming week to help out at various organizations that provide food and lodging for the most vulnerable in Chicago. Our group will start the week by visiting Amber Naylor, a St. Paul member and student at Garrett UM Seminary, at the church where she works and help out in the homeless shelter they host. It will start off a wonderful week of service as well as education and cultural exposure as we will visit various religious sites as well as a few tourists' destinations in Chicago.

Sent forth in mission can mean a variety of things as we attempt to live in the spirit of Christ. As we have been reading through the letter of 2nd Corinthians the last eight weeks we have come to see that for Paul mission meant preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ to people who had never heard of it in the various cities he visited throughout the Roman Empire. In our lesson today from the 12th chapter of II Corinthians we see that Paul notes that a major source of his authority to preach is direct revelation from God. Paul notes that he "was caught up in Paradise" and heard things of heaven.

Paul underlines this sense of his authority in his letter to the Galatians (1:11-12) where he states "For I would have you know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel which is preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from any human, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Direct revelation that Paul claims to have had repeatedly ties in with the story Luke recounts about Paul's first encounter with Christ the 9th chapter in the book of Acts. Luke tells us that the resurrected Christ stops Paul on his journey to Damascus and speaks to him directly. Paul was surprised by his encounters with Christ, revelations, and they changed his life.

Sent forth in mission can mean preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ to others. It can also mean letting our action do the talking for us. Legend has it that a missionary was lost at sea and was by chance washed up out of the sea on the edge of a remote village. Half-dead from starvation, exposure, and sea water, he was found by the people of the village and was nursed back to full health. Subsequently, he lived among these people for twenty years. During the whole time he confessed no faith. He uttered no songs. He preached no sermons. He neither read nor recited any scripture. He made no personal faith claim. But when people were sick, he attended to them, sitting long into the night. When people were hungry, he gave them food. When people were lonely, he was a source of company. He taught the children and any adults who desired a formal education. He always took the side of those who had been wronged. There was not a single human condition with which he did not identify.

After twenty years had passed, missionaries came from the sea to the island and began talking about a man called Jesus, and after hearing about Jesus, the natives insisted that he had live among them for the past twenty years. "Come, we will introduce you to the man about whom you have been speaking." The missionaries were led to a hut, and there they found their long-lost fellow missionary whom they had thought dead.

Those who have gone on mission trips from St. Paul over the decades probably feel a closer connection with the legend of this missionary on the remote island than we do with Paul's mission of preaching in the Roman Empire. We are more inclined to let our actions do our talking than standing up and preaching to strangers. Yet, it is always good to be prepared to share about the love of Jesus in our lives when we are asked. The youth group this week will join in such preparation at the end of each day. Each evening we will have a time of reflection. One question we will talk about is how we saw the presence of God in our activities during the day. That is a good process for each of us (alone or with others) at the end of each day (on a mission trip or in the midst of our routine).

It is neat to see our youth going on a mission trip because it allows them to experience the value of service to others that will benefit them for the whole of their lives. The idea of helping others comes quicker to some than it does to others. It came slowly for Marian who was born in Hungary back in 1913 as she was raised in a castle with her aristocratic family, surrounded with maids, tutors, governesses, butlers and chauffeurs. Her grandmother, who lived with them, insisted that whenever they traveled, they take their own linen, for she believed it was beneath their dignity to sleep between sheets used by common people.

While attending school in Vienna, Marian met a handsome young Viennese doctor. They fell in love, eloped, and married when she was only eighteen. The marriage lasted only a year and she returned to Vienna to begin her life as an actress. While auditioning for a play, she met the brilliant young German director, Otto Preminger. They fell in love and soon married. They went to America soon thereafter, where he began his career as a movie director. Unfortunately and tragically, Hollywood can be a place of dramatic illustrations of people “biting, devouring, and consuming” one another. Marian was caught up in the glamour, lights, and superficial excitement and soon began to live a sordid life. When Preminger discovered it, he divorced her.

Marian returned to Europe to live the life of a socialite in Paris. In 1948 she learned through the newspaper that Albert Schweitzer, Christian scholar and humanitarian to Africa that she had read about as a little girl, was making one of his periodic visits to Europe and was staying nearby. She phoned his secretary and was given an appointment to see Dr. Schweitzer the next day. When Marian arrived in the small town outside of Paris where he was staying she discovered he was in the village church playing the organ. She listened and turned pages of music for him. After a visit he invited her to have dinner with him. By the end of the day she knew she had discovered what she had been looking for all her life. She was with him every day thereafter during his visit, and when he returned to Africa he invited her to come and work in a hospital there.

Marian did—and found herself. There in Africa, the girl who was born in a castle and raised like a princess, who was accustomed to being waited on with all the luxuries of a spoiled life, became a servant. She changed bandages, bathed babies, fed lepers...and became free. Marian wrote her autobiography and called it *All I Ever Wanted was Everything*. She could not get the “everything” that would satisfy and give meaning until she could give everything. When she died in 1979, the New York Times carried her obituary, which included this statement from her: “Albert Schweitzer said there are two classes of people in this world—the helpers and the non-helpers. I’m a helper.”

Isn't that what Jesus does for us when He sends us forth in mission? We become helpers. Please keep the St. Paul Mission Team in your prayers as they travel and work in Chicago this week as they are being sent forth in mission.