

Have you ever been sent on a task? Have you ever been sent on an errand? How did it make you feel?

I have had the great fortune of being able to lead a mission trip to Bolivia. It was and remains one of the most significant experiences of my life.

Bolivia is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. I was there during a time of crisis in the Methodist Church of Bolivia. The crisis was caused because a Bishop of the church started to abuse his power and take over Church properties and funds and use them as his own private properties and funds. When the denomination went through a legal process to remove him from office he seized property and went to court to retain property. It was an ugly mess that eventually ended up in the Bolivian Supreme court.

One afternoon, I was working at digging a three-foot deep trench that would be the foundation of a new building, when I received a phone call from the New Bishop of Bolivia. When I took the call, he asked if I would please come to LaPaz and appear before the Supreme Court of the land and let them know that I represented 10 million United Methodists in the United States and we were watching their proceedings.

Needless to say, I was shocked at what he was asking me to do. I said, "Look, I am not all that important. I am here on a mission trip. I have work clothes. I don't have dress clothes. I am an Associate Pastor. I don't really represent anyone."

I went on and made several excuses as to why I was not a good person to be sent on this task.

The truth is, I really felt inadequate. After all, I grew up on the plains of North Dakota, the son of an average, hard-working couple. I didn't feel all that special. I didn't feel like I should be sent anywhere to do an important task. Do you know what that is like?

In our scripture for today, all of us who seek to be faithful to God are being sent on a task. What is that task? It is a daunting one . . . *Love from the center of who you are, don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil, hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply . . . don't burn out, keep yourselves fueled and aflame.*

What is the task we are being sent on? The task we are being sent on is to live faith in our world. To dare to make a difference for God, in our world. You and me, we are sent. We are sent to live our faith. We are sent to bring the love and grace of God that we have experienced into this world. We are sent to be real and genuine. How do you feel about being sent?

You might feel as inadequate as I did in Bolivia. I finally told the Bishop I would come to LaPaz and help out on two conditions (neither of which I thought would be met) One is if my Bishop in Wisconsin faxed me and told me I should go. And Two if the mission team I was leading agreed to it.

Within an hour, I was holding a fax from Bishop Rader, the former Bishop in Wisconsin. Within a couple of hours, the mission team I was leading convinced me that I should go to LaPaz. They were willing to send me in completely borrowed clothes. The only thing I had on of mine when I stepped on the airplane the next day was my underwear.

The important lesson I learned in all of that was, I am not alone. When we are sent by God, we are sent with others in the church. That is the gift of church. That is the value of church. We get to walk with others. This is what fellowship and service are all about. It is about loving God enough, to walk with others on this journey through life.

I recently heard a true story about a young man who had attended a church off and on. He liked the congregation. It was friendly. He really liked the minister. But his wife didn't want to go to church at all. She didn't think they needed it.

Then, this young man was called up to serve in the military. He was to be off to Iraq within the month.

He was visiting with the minister and said, "I am really nervous about leaving my family and going to Iraq. And everything they tell us in the military is get involved with your church. Don't leave your family alone.

"When I turn on the TV, I am reminded how the churches are there to support people and help them through challenges. But I have never really had this type of a relationship with the church. And now, as I leave to go to war, I desperately want that for my life and for my wife and children. I want to know that there is a group of people who will pray for me. I desperately want my wife and children to be supported by a group of good people from the church." Then with tears in his eyes, he added, "I want them to have what I never had."

That young man who had no real association with the church, understood one of the marks of church is that the people of church are in this life together, it us up to us to support each other, to lift up each other. And this doesn't just happen by accident.

It only happens when each one of us begins to pray and ask, "Who God, do you want me to connect with? Who, God, do you want me to lift up? How God, can I let You live through me?"

This is the value of being a part of a small group. It helps us connect with other people, to get to know them as we ask our questions of faith. It helps us support each other through good times and tough times. Are you a part of a small group yet? Who are you willing to connect with to show the love of Christ?

I long for the day when everyone in our church and each one of our groups is committed deeply to service to others. For this is when we move our commitment to missions in action in the world. We can do it through practical ways like gathering on a Saturday to clean windows for businesses downtown as a way to show God's love.

I long for the day when each and every group in our church from Sunday School classes to youth groups to choirs to small groups and committees are involved in at least one mission experience a year. What are you willing to do in service for God, to make this world a better place? Are you willing to be sent?

Sometimes, we may not feel very special or even all that important. So long ago, when I went to LaPaz, I met with the Bolivian Supreme Court Justices. I asked them to rule on behalf of the church.

One year later I was ordained an Elder here in Wisconsin. The Bishop from Bolivia was here. When he saw me he gave me a huge hug and said, "Scott, have you heard what happened? About three weeks after you had visited the Supreme Court, the Justices ruled on our behalf. I am convinced it happened because of your visit and the contacts of so many people from this country. Thank you for what you were willing to do."

That was when I learned, we might just feel inadequate when we are called by God. But we are called to live genuinely and love honestly. to share our faith, to be involved in fellowship and in service to make the world a better place. And God will help us. May God help us do our part to help our church live out its mission.

Amen