



Send Me, O Lord, That Your Good News is Received

A key strategic understanding for Christian ministry is whether we are sent or is the Good News of Jesus received. It is the classic push or pull debate. Our desire among the CMBA family of congregations is to advocate for the receiving of the Good News of Jesus.

The first time I (George Bullard) delivered a sermon before a gathered congregation was during the Easter break of my freshman year in college. During that break, my church in Pennsylvania licensed me to preach. My text was Isaiah 6:1-8 which reaches a crescendo with the familiar verse 8 – “Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

I suspect every person in Christian ministry has preached and taught that text, memorized verse eight, and claimed it as part of their personal assurance of God’s spiritual call.

The concept of being sent is so strong in our evangelical Christian tradition, so often mentioned in various ways in the Bible, that it is the institutionalized and programmatic way many Baptists express the call to ministry. This is true especially for the call to missional service that involves living in a distant place or connecting with a people group very different than the person sent.

The Bible – written from the perspective of those who worship the Triune God – in various English translations uses the word “sent” so often that it has become hardwired into our Baptist culture as the correct word.

But is it?

Is our goal to be “sent?” Or is the goal of the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment that people “receive” the Good News of Jesus Christ? I vote for “receive.” It places the emphasis on the persons who need to hear and respond to the Good News rather than the persons declaring the Good News. What we want is not the success of the persons sent, but the significance and surrender of the persons who receive the Good News of Jesus.

I like John 1:12 which reads, “But as many as received Him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” (NASB) Also, Acts 2:41, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” (NASB)

This perspective is not to de-emphasize sent people. They are of great importance. Calling and sending people is mandatory. It is simply to say the overall mission is not to be sent, but for people to receive the Good News of Jesus. Our focus must be on others more than ourselves.

CMBA is currently working with a congregation in a Covenant Congregational Pilgrimage on developing a focused strategy for people living within a defined community of 2,800 households. The focus of the current dialogue is on ways to connect with the households and cultivate a loving relationship with them whereby the Good News of Jesus might be received by them. The primary focus is on the households, their characteristics, and their spiritual condition.

The secondary focus is on how many people, with what characteristics, and using what type of actions need to be sent into the community to connect with the households. It is obvious more people than this congregation currently has as Christian leaders need to be sent. So, prayerful actions are taking place to discern, develop, and deploy sent people.

Workers for the harvest are essential. But is it the harvest that is our focus and goal.