

Intro

Today we'll be following on what Brent has been talking about with discipleship in the sermon on the mount. We'll be looking at what the mission of disciples is. There are many things that disciples are supposed to do. We are supposed to be in community with others, worship God, publicly identify with Jesus, pray, study the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, share our faith, forgive each other, feed the hungry, heal the sick, etc, etc. Mission doesn't fall into that class of things, it's not best understood as something that disciples do, instead it is the very reason that Jesus calls us to discipleship in the first place.

I think it is helpful to understand discipleship as means to an end. The end is the Reign/Kingdom of God, the world and life as God intended. Mission is then understood as the storyline of the whole drama of creation. It is God's purposes, his dreams for this world, becoming reality. It is really, to borrow the phrase Brent loves, the story we find ourselves in.

The church(at least in the west) lost this understanding of mission for a long time. When the culture became identified with the christian faith, when we entered christendom, mission became something we did "out there". We sent missionaries to other counties that weren't christian. We didn't do mission here. Here we did evangelism. It was assumed that everyone here knew the story of God and Jesus and if they weren't living it they were in rebellion. If you weren't a missionary you lost your part in mission storyline. That is still the case some places, but by and large america(and all of the west) is now moving into a post-christian era. This presents many challenges, but it also has helped restore to us an understanding of what it meant for the early church to be a part of the mission drama. We are regaining an understanding of our missionary God. I'm sure you've probably heard the term *Missio Dei*. It's often translated as God's mission... but it is probably more accurate to translate it as Missionary God. Mission understood more as an attribute of God than just something God does.

Because of this, to understand our mission we need to look at the very nature and character of God, and more specifically Jesus, to get a proper understanding of mission. Because we understand God through Jesus, he is our view of what God looks like, we will start with him.

Understanding Jesus

Let's look at Jesus for a few minutes. Let's start with what John tells us in the beginning of his gospel:

John 1:1-5, 9-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

...

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word of God became flesh. The incarnation. Getting an understanding of that is very important for understanding mission. God planted himself among us. He didn't just send different people to tell us how to get things right. He had tried that with the prophets and it didn't work. Now he was coming himself. In the person of Jesus we have God showing us what life is supposed to look like, by living it himself. That is a very powerful concept, but one that can easily be misunderstood. It is important for us to recognize the motivation for the incarnation. What was God's motivation? We find that in what has to be the most famous verse in the bible, John 3:16 and the following verse.

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God's motivation for sending Jesus, for the Word becoming Flesh, was love for the world and to save/rescue the world.

Understanding the story of the world as told in scripture we know that the world was the way God intended at one time and then it fell apart. Since then God has been on a mission to restore humanity and to set things right. To fix the problems that we've caused. That is the story we see from Genesis through Revelation. First he chose Abraham, and from him created a nation, Israel, through whom he would show the world the way things were supposed to be. That plan culminated in Jesus, who fulfilled Israel's purposes, and through his followers it broke out of national boundaries. The plan has always been the same though, rescue the lost world, restore the broken world, correct the misguided world, restore things to the way they are supposed to be. It was motivated by God's love for the world he created that went astray.

Reign of God

By Jesus' time a vocabulary developed to talk about God's intentions for the world. The phrase used was the Reign/Kingdom of God. The idea was that God's will would be done just like a King's will was done in his kingdom. As we hear in the Lord's Prayer: "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". God's dreams for the world come true. Then, like now, people had different understandings of what the world would look like if God's will was done, if the kingdom was to come. We as christians are convinced that it would look like Jesus said it would look in his teachings and how he modeled it. That is why discipleship is so important. We are to live like God wants the world to look. But if we were to just do that without understanding mission we would miss the full purposes of God, the whole world fully restored.

Because our lives are connected so deeply into Jesus' life that Paul says we are his body, it's very important for us to not only know Jesus' teachings, but to know the story of his life, death and resurrection. To find our place in God's story through him. To know our Christology:

Christology

Jesus was motivated by God's love for the world(John 3:16), he was God on the scene, incarnated(John 1:14) and sent to the world. It was very instructive for me to look at all the times in the gospel of John that Jesus says he was sent from the Father:

John 5:36

"I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—

the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me.

John 5:37

And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form,

John 6:44

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.

John 6:57

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

John 8:16

But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.

John 8:18

I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

John 8:42

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.

John 10:36

what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?

John 12:49

For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken.

John 14:24

Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

John 17:21

that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:25

"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.

John 20:21

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Do we get the point? Jesus really seemed to want people to know that the Father sent him. It was a core part of his identity. He was sent for the sake of the world. To be the way, truth and life(John 14:6) for the world. To save the world(John 3:17). In the gospels we are very much given the picture of redeeming the corrupted, rescuing the lost, forgiving the repentant offender and healing the broken.

And then on the mount of olives we see a radical trust in God. "Not my will, but your will be done"(Luke 22:42). That trust was not in vain as God raised him to life after he sacrificed himself for us.

That is the story of Jesus. That is the mission of Jesus. The last verse we just read from John is after the resurrection. It's after Jesus' redemptive work on the cross was accomplished. He says:

John 20:21

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Missiology

Our mission is the extension of Jesus' mission. We understand our mission by understanding Jesus' mission. Alan Hirsch is fond of saying that our Ecclesiology follows our Missiology which follows our Christology. That is a big word way of saying that our understanding of church should be shaped by our understanding of mission, which should be shaped by our understanding of Jesus.

If we take that seriously then what would our mission look like? We, like Jesus, are sent into the world because of God's love for it. To save/rescue/redeem the world. We are to be Jesus incarnate, the body of Christ, in our neighborhoods and at our workplaces. We would radically trust that no matter how bad things looked or were that God is at work in the world to save it. That eventually the world would be the way he intended again. That not even death stops God's plan and that the dead will be resurrected like Jesus was resurrected.

It's instructive to look at the last words Jesus leaves his disciples with. Parting words are important words. Let's look at the very end of Matthew's gospel:

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

And then in Acts, right before he ascends to heaven we have this:

Acts 1:6-9

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

The last thing he left them with was an outward focus. Seems like a HUGE task, but we aren't left on our own to do this. As was just mentioned, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. In John's gospel we have it recorded that Jesus promising that the Holy Spirit would be sent to us.

John 14:26

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

As we've seen, our understanding of being sent, of being on mission, comes from our very trinitarian

understanding of God. The Father sends Jesus, and they send the Holy Spirit... and they all send us. It's one big sending party. Probably the biggest witness that this was the understanding of the early church is what they did after getting this commission. They lived it.

Early apostles/missionaries

1st Century:

West to Europe -> Turkey, Greece, Italy, probably Spain

South to Africa -> Egypt, Ethiopia

East to Asia -> Armenia, Assyria, Parthia, India, maybe Russia

2nd/3rd Century:

Throughout Europe, into Arabia, China and most of Asia

Of the twelve apostles only John lived to a natural death. The rest were killed for their witness while out living their mission.

The word apostle means "sent one". As does the word missionary. While there have been people who have very much filled those roles for the church, the church itself has understood itself as apostolic from the beginning, as sent from God. We still had that understanding at the time the Nicene Creed was written. In it we find the line:

[We believe] In one holy catholic and apostolic Church

The church was the sent church. The missional church. We are to go out into the world, helping others find their life in Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and go to our neighborhoods, cities, regions and the ends of the earth being Jesus' witnesses. That is our part in the story of God. To be disciples of Jesus, living like God intends the world to be, for the sake of the world. That is our mission.