



SENT INTO THE WORLD



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John 17:1-26
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In June of 1944, a young man named John Eddington wrote a letter from an army base in Texas to his daughter who had just been born. Shortly after he wrote this letter, he was deployed to Italy to fight in World War II and was killed. He forgot to send the letter he had written.

Seventy years later, a woman in St. Louis was cleaning out the house of her husband's grandparents. She found a box of war memorabilia. Inside that box was a letter from a young man to his infant daughter. By searching on the internet and public libraries she found Peggy Eddington-Smith. Peggy was the original intended recipient of this letter. Seven decades after being written, this letter was finally delivered.

For all of you pack-rats out there, this story alone justifies your obsession. For those of us married to people who get rid of stuff if we don't touch it for a week, it's a little bit of ammunition for holding onto things.

John Eddington wrote a letter that he intended to send, but he never got around to it. Have you ever written something that you never sent? I can think of plenty of emails that I wish I had never sent. Now I have a great feature on my email account that allows me to change my mind in the first 15 seconds after sending an email. I've used it a lot. It's amazing how much clearer you think after pressing send. I love being able to change my mind in that moment.

Today we are wrapping up our Lenten series in the Upper Room Discourse of the Gospel of John. We started a series in the Gospel of John last September that we've been calling *Signs of Life*. For the last seven weeks, we've been in John 13–17. These chapters record the incredible interaction between Jesus and his disciples in the last moments before he is arrested and executed.

Our passage this morning is John 17:1–26, the last part of this section. It's often referred to as the High Priestly Prayer because it records Jesus interceding to God for the sake of his followers in the same way that a priest would. It's a bit mind-blowing to be able to listen in to Jesus praying for his disciples. Here is Jesus, the Son of God, God incarnate, speaking to the Father. It's a conversation within the Trinity of the godhead. Not

something that you hear every day. We can learn a lot by listening to what Jesus asks God to do for us.

Jesus is aware that his time is short. He was sent to earth with a purpose, and he realizes that he has accomplished his work, but there is still much to be done. So just as God sent Jesus into the world, Jesus is now sending his disciples. They are to carry on the work that he began. His mission is becoming their mission. Jesus' prayer has one main idea. He wants the disciples to be prepared to be sent into the world. This is what Jesus wants for us: to be sent into the world.

The Gospel of John opened with the idea that Jesus was sent into the world. In the first few verses of this book, we heard of the Word who was with God. Then we found out that the Word became flesh and dwelt with us on earth. Jesus came to earth in order to make God known to the world.

We had a sense all along that what Jesus did when he was on earth is related to what we ought to do in our lives. But here Jesus makes it explicit. Here he asks the Father to prepare his followers to be sent into the world.

As he does so, he moves through three related ideas. First he talks of receiving something from the Father and passing it on to those who believe in him. Then he asks the Father to help his disciples in their mission of being sent into the world. He wants God to help them in the work that is to be done. Finally, he asks God to develop their relationships with each other.

Jesus begins by talking about receiving. Then he talks about being sent. He finishes by talking about unity. This is the progression that Jesus wants God to help us with. We receive, we are sent, and we are unified. What we'll see today is that we are one people coming together to share what God has given us.

It's an exciting passage and it connects particularly well with what we have going on as a church. Today we kick off our official signups for the May *Life in Action: Beautiful Day* weekend. I wish I could say we'd planned it this way, but all the credit goes to God working behind the scenes. The day we kick off an event where we go into the world

to worship through service, we hear about Jesus sending us into the world. I love when God does that.

So let's see how Jesus asks God to help us continue with his mission of being sent into the world.

Receive Life

Here's the first part of this passage. This is Jesus talking about the relationship that he has with the Father.

John 17:1–8—

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.”

Nine times in these eight verses, Jesus talks about something being given. Mostly it is the Father giving something to the Son. In verse 2, God gives the Son authority. In verse 4, God gives the Son work to do. In verse 6, God gives the Son a group of people. In verse 8, the Son gives that group of people the words he received from the Father. And they receive them.

The progression is clear. God has given a bunch of stuff to the Son. The Son received it and did what he was supposed to do with it. Now he has given it to his followers.

Jesus is really specific about the mission that he is on. He says that God entrusted him with the authority to give something away. He was sent to deliver something. His mission was to be a carrier. Verse 2 says that he was sent to “*give eternal life to all whom you have given him.*”

And then Jesus gives us a short definition of eternal life. Verse 3 says “*this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” We've been saying this all along in this series in the Gospel of John, but with these words, things are becoming clearer.

Jesus is the source of life. The early part of this gospel said that he was involved in the original creation of life. Now he is sent as a messenger. A carrier from the Father, authorized to deliver eternal life to those who believe in him. The substance of eternal life is the very relationship that he is establishing: to know God the Father and to know Jesus, the sent one.

Eternal life is a relationship.

Some people think eternal life is a set of beliefs, as if believing the right thing is the experience of life. You know the kind of person I'm talking about. They put a lot of weight in *being* right. They know all the right ideas. They have it all figured out. They think life is about having all the answers. But that's not the case. You have to believe the right things about God to be in a relationship with him, but the life is in the relationship, not the ideas.

Some people think eternal life is a set of actions: a routine of attending church or Bible study or prayer or service or whatever. You know some of these people too. They put a lot of weight in *doing* right. They are disciplined and pure and proud of it. They think life is about doing the right things. But that's not the case either. Relationships involve actions, but the life is in the relationship itself, not the actions.

Eternal life is a relationship. A few weeks ago we saw Jesus define that relationship as a friendship. Eternal life is friendship with God.

There are several people in my life that I can honestly say changed my life. I can imagine my life taking a very different path if I had not known them. I'm sure there are people like that in your life too. When I think about them, it is hard to pinpoint how they influenced me. It isn't about what they taught me, though they did teach me important things. It isn't about how they acted, though I have modeled some of my behavior after theirs. Ultimately, it's simply about knowing them. Our friendship changed my life. I might even say our friendship gave me life.

That's why Jesus defines eternal life as knowing God. And that's why it is so important to realize that Jesus is sent from God. We have to believe that Jesus is from God if he is going to be able to help us to know God.

So for us, all of this about being part of the mission of Jesus starts with one thing. We have to receive Jesus. Before we can give anything, we have to receive. Just as Jesus received authority and purpose and a message from God, we have to receive the same thing. We have to believe that Jesus is sent from God. We have to experience this eternal life. Our mission starts by receiving life.

Before we can be sent, we have to receive. Think about mailing a letter old school: using the Post Office. First, I sit down and I write something down. Then I give to a mail carrier. Maybe I put it in one of those big blue boxes. I am doing the sending. But the process starts with them receiving it.

The US Postal Service takes this very seriously. I told you about my email service that lets me change my mind about sending an email for 15 seconds after I press send. You can't do that with the big blue box. If I drop a letter in there and then try to get it back, I've committed a crime, a federal crime. The process of sending begins with receiving. Receiving is really important.

What about you? Jesus is confident that the disciples he is praying for have received his words and come to know in truth that he came from God. He knows that they believe that God sent Jesus. Do you believe that? Have you received this kind of eternal life?

It's not just a question of whether you consider yourself a Christian or whether you have responded to Jesus Christ. You need to know what it is you have received so that you know the message you have to deliver. There's no point delivering something other than what was intended.

We haven't simply received a set of ideas or a pattern of behavior. We have received the life that comes from a relationship with God: prayer, worship, asking, frustration, confusion, discipline, growth, doubt, affirmation.

Is this what you have received? If not, will you receive it? Will you begin or renew a relationship with God through Jesus? There's still time to start that kind of a relationship. There's still time to sign up to be baptized next week on Easter Sunday.

Being sent begins with receiving. God gave Jesus the authority to give away eternal life. When we believe in him, this is what we receive. We receive life.

Be Sent

Jesus is praying to the Father, asking him to equip his disciples with what they need to carry on his mission. He has talked about what he received to fulfill his mission

and how he passed it on to his disciples. Now he makes it explicit that they are being sent into the world.

John 17:9–19—

“I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

Verse 18 is the key verse of this section. Jesus says, *“as you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”* This is actually a key verse in the entire gospel of John. This is the verse that makes it clear, without a doubt that our calling is to carry on the mission of Jesus. Our calling is to be sent into the world just as Jesus was sent.

In order to talk about being sent, Jesus begins by making a distinction. He says that this prayer is for the disciples, not for the world. His disciples are all those who believe in him. The world is everyone else. This distinction is important because if you are going to send something somewhere, there has to be some distinction between the one carrying the message and the one receiving the message.

There is a phrase that Christians often use to describe this distinction. It is said that we are supposed to be *“in the world,”* but not *“of the world.”* That idea comes from this passage. In verse 11, Jesus says, *“they are in the world,”* and in verse 16, he says, *“they are not of the world.”* So it is true that we are *“in the world, but not of the world.”*

But that isn't the full picture. If that's your answer to how Christians relate to the world, it's deficient. Jesus doesn't tell his disciples to be *"in the world."* That would mean that we are supposed to co-exist with all the people around us, but not be affected by them.

This is how a lot of people understand this passage and how a lot of people live. But it's not what Jesus says. Jesus says that we are not *"of the world,"* instead we are *"sent into the world."* We are not just in the world; we are sent into the world.

We order a lot of stuff from Amazon. In fact, the other day we were in Target and it felt so strange to be in a store. So UPS is pretty familiar with us. We know the name of the guy who usually delivers to us and we'll often chat with him as he's dropping off a package. And that's great—we enjoy knowing him and seeing him around our neighborhood.

But here's the question: how do I describe my relationship with the UPS guy? I might be friendly with him. But there is only one essential aspect of our relationship. He delivers stuff to me. He is the messenger. I am the recipient.

This is the relationship that Jesus says we have with the world. We are sent. That is a lot different than simply being in it. Sending implies action. Sending implies purpose. Sending implies communication. Sending implies a message. Jesus wants God to prepare his disciples to be sent, to carry on his mission. We are not of the world, but we are sent into the world.

Jesus makes two requests of God to help his disciples fulfill their mission. In verse 11 he asks God to *"keep them in your name."* In verse 17 he asks God to *"sanctify them in the truth."* Jesus prays that as we are sent into the world, we have to remember what we have received. We have to stay connected to God. And we have to remain in the truth.

There is no point being sent into the world and forgetting what you are supposed to be delivering. You can't be a messenger without a message.

But sometimes we stop at remembering the message. For the most part, we're pretty good around here at staying in God's name. We're pretty good at doing what we can to be sanctified in the truth. Jesus prayed those things so that his disciples wouldn't forget the message that they were sent to deliver.

Have we become so focused on remembering the message that we have forgotten to deliver it?

Over time, it's really easy for a church to turn inward. It's really easy to only pay attention to the needs of this community. Those needs are essentially limitless. Who

among us couldn't benefit from a little more prayer? A little more counsel? A little more attention? It's so easy to focus inside. So we need reminders that we have a mission, a purpose. We are sent.

As God often does, a lot of things are coming together around this theme lately: both for me personally and as far as I can tell, for us as a church. Our decision to suspend worship services for a Sunday and go out into the community is connected to this conviction. We actually just had a conversation this past week in our pastor's Bible study about how we as a church can move out into the world in more intentional ways.

We're brainstorming what it would look like for us to try to balance the inward focused activities we do with outward focused activities. All of those discussions are in the early stages, but it's exciting to me that God is working in so many ways within our community: connecting dots, moving people in the same direction.

That is not to say that we haven't been doing this all along. But it could be a new season of making this more explicit and intentional. When we believe in Jesus, we receive the life of a relationship with God. Then Jesus sends us into the world to deliver that life to others. We are on a mission.

Be One

As Jesus prays to the Father for the sake of his disciples, he is asking that God prepare them for this mission. First he talks about what they have received. Then he talks about what they need to be sent. But the last thing he asks for is a bit of a surprise.

John 17:20–26—

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.²⁵ O righteous Father, even though

the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Jesus begins by making it explicit that we are included in the group of people that he is praying for. Jesus started talking about what the Father gave him. Then he talked about giving it to his disciples. Now he recognizes that these disciples give it to others. And all of these are included in the mission of following Jesus. It becomes a huge network of messengers.

What he prays for this network is simple, yet profound. He asks that they would be one. He wants believers to experience unity: that they feel connected to each other. In fact, he asks that they experience the deepest kind of unity that exists: the oneness that is felt among the members of the Trinity. That's a really high bar.

Why does Jesus ask for this? He's changing focus. He has just been talking about how believers are supposed to relate to the world, but now he changes to talk about how they relate to each other.

When I was working in software development, one of my coworkers would always stop by my desk to chat. He always wanted to talk about something going on in his life. He would just hang out in my cubicle and never seemed to take the hint that I had work to do.

Another one of my coworkers was nothing but business. Meetings started immediately on time. There was no conversation except work and as soon as that was over, everyone left. It was all about what we had to get done. All about the mission.

People tend to fall somewhere on the spectrum of those extremes. Some people are extremely task-oriented. Others are very people-oriented. It's easy to move in one direction or the other. You either get things done or you build relationships.

The same dichotomy happens in the church. I know of churches and Christian groups that are all about the task. The mission is everything there is. It's all about how much you can accomplish for God. If you're not being productive, you're unspiritual. There can be a lot of guilt in those kinds of churches.

I've also been in churches and communities where the only concern is whether people are friends with each other. The whole goal is to become a nice happy family. They can

be oblivious to anyone on the outside. There can be a lot of complacency in those kinds of churches.

Jesus recognizes that these two values have to go together. That's why he prays that believers would be one. Being sent into the world also means that we need to come together. To work towards unity with each other. We need to be one.

Jesus prays for his disciples so that they can experience unity in the midst of their mission. He wants them to be able to have goals together. But then he says something else that connects all the dots.

In verse 23, he prays *“that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”*

This is incredible. The mission is to introduce people to God. When that happens, they come together in a community. The world knows the true identity of Jesus through the unity of the community. It all circles back on itself.

If you're building software and there are dysfunctional relationships within your team, it makes achieving your goal much more difficult. It's a lot easier to build software when the people working on it get along together. But the truth is that at the end of the day, the software has nothing to do with the people that wrote it. If they can manage to write good software while hating each other, as long as the software works, everything is fine.

But what if you're building a family? What if the relationships that you are developing are the purpose? The community is the goal. In that case, even if you are incredibly efficient and strategic and industrious, it's impossible to build a family if you don't get along together. Because that's not a family.

Our unity serves the mission because it is the mission to bring people together around faith in Christ.

A few days ago, I met with a small group of other pastors and leaders in our area. We were talking about how we can affect our local community for the gospel. We spent most of our time talking about this dynamic. If churches are going to work together we have to know each other. We have to trust each other. We have to build real, genuine relationships so that we can come together in partnership.

That's really exciting to me because it's all of this coming together. Churches and fellowships and believers from different traditions unifying for the sake of our shared mission. That's the whole package. You build new

relationships. You learn to trust people different from you. You grow in your faith. And all of that is demonstrated as the kind of life God can give to a world that desperately needs it.

The mission is the community. The community is the mission. Becoming one with each other serves the gospel. Becoming one with each other is the gospel.

Conclusion

We started off this morning talking about a letter written by John Eddington in 1944 to his daughter Peggy. He wrote this letter but forgot to send it. Seventy years later, it was found and delivered. Here are some excerpts of what John said to his daughter.

You have never seen me or may never see me for some time. I'm sending you this so that you will always know that you have a very proud daddy somewhere in this world. [I] love you so much. [I am] going to give you everything [I] can. [I] will always give you all the love [I] have. I love you with all my heart and soul forever and forever. Your loving daddy.

John Eddington wanted to communicate something very important to his child. He wanted that child to know about her father who loved him. The message nearly missed being received. But in the end it was. Thank God.

As Jesus wraps up the time with his disciples and prays to the Father on their behalf, he is writing a letter to the world. He wants the world to know of a father who sent Jesus because he loved them. He wants them to know that God “loved them even as he loved Jesus.”

We are that letter. We are supposed to be sent into the world. We can't make the mistake John Eddington made and forget to send the letter.

Throughout this morning we've been using an image of a big blue mailbox across the street from our church. In deciding to use this message, Jake pointed out that this kind of mailbox is unique because it's only used for sending. You don't see these as much as you used to, but there are still around.

My suggestion is to allow these big blue sending mailboxes to serve as a reminder for you. Every time you

see one, remember that we are sent into the world. We aren't just “*in the world.*” We are “*sent into the world.*” We receive life. We are sent into the world on a mission. And we do it together.