

Called and Sent Out

Text: Exodus 20:1-17

I Corinthians 1:18-25 (Series B, 3rd Sunday in Lent) Ps. 19

John 2:13-22

(Jesus said,) "You did not choose me. I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will last."

Let us pray:

When Sandie Black died, she was mourned by hundreds of people who didn't even know her name. As word spread that Sandie had died from cancer at the age of 67, many of those she had befriended returned to the neighbourhood cafe to talk about the way she had helped them. Men and women, many of them now middle-aged, told how Sandie had helped them - to find a place to live, to find a job, even which bus to catch.

One successful businessman told of the day he had arrived in town with only a dollar in his pocket. He was just 19. Sandie was in the cafe when he came to spend his last dollar for a hot meal. She offered to buy him dinner.

A man who owned a cafe remembered the time Sandie had filled in as a waitress when his regular staff had failed to show. A man who owned a construction company remembered how Sandie befriended him when he first arrived from Greece.

A now prominent attorney remembered how she helped him find a place to live. The pastor of the local church recalled how Sandie turned up Sunday after Sunday to teach her Sunday School class even though, on many occasions, she had been up all Saturday night helping a sick mother or sitting at the hospital.

Sandie Black, who spent a large part of her life ministering in a modest way to people with needs, would probably have been surprised at how many people still remembered the little favours she had done. A humble, sincere Christian, Sandie Black ministered in the name of Christ.

That's a great story but it's the kind of story that you only hear about in sermons. A story about a person, who gives in such a selfless way in almost reckless disregard for herself but in total concern for others, is something so unreal and so far away from what is happening in our world today.

Sandie Black was an exceptional person – her compassion, her generosity, her willingness to help, her self-sacrifice were special gifts, and she used them to the best of her ability. By all accounts, she was an exceptional person.

Every now and then, you hear of others in our community who are recklessly generous with their love – Mother Teresa, Albert Schweitzer, brother John or perhaps you know someone who is ready to help using whatever skills they have – maybe a parent, a special friend, a grandparent, your spouse, a member of a faith community or perhaps someone who belongs to another faith. Nothing is too much trouble for them. You can always rely on them to do whatever they can to help you in your situation.

For such people, a life of service is no *"flash in the pan,"* here today and gone tomorrow. They relentlessly pursue a life of service, going from one thing to the next. It's almost as if they can't help it. Where there is a need, they do something about it. And the amazing thing is this – they aren't even aware that they are doing something extraordinary.

There is someone I haven't mentioned yet who was so reckless with his love and so unselfish in his giving to those who needed his help – that's Jesus, of course. We are in the weeks leading up to Good Friday, and we are well aware of the way Jesus gave himself so sacrificially, selflessly, recklessly, and generously. He went so far as to give his life for us – even though we don't deserve such love. His whole life was one of generous giving to all who came to him with their questions, their problems, and their sicknesses. He gave to these people to the point of exhaustion.

Then we hear Jesus say, *"You did not choose me. I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit."* In his love, Jesus has chosen us to be his disciples. He saved us; he has joined us to God's family, and now he says that we are appointed to go and bear fruit, fruit that grows out of the very fact that we are children of God and Jesus' disciples.

He has appointed us to bear the fruit of love, not an airy fairy kind of love, not just nice words of love, but a love that is demonstrated in all kinds of practical ways; a love that leads us to use the gifts and abilities that God has given us to meet the needs of others; a love that reaches out to others in practical ways not just when we feel like it or when we feel in the mood, but the kind of love that is ready at any time to use whatever resources we have at our disposal to bear fruit in such a way that what we do will leave a permanent mark on the lives of those who are helped. It may even lead that person to a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.

God chose each of us at our baptism and brought us into his kingdom. He has joined us together as the church and made us important parts of the body of Christ. When Jesus said, *"You did not choose me. I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will last,"* he was not just talking to us as individuals but was talking to the church. Remember the church is people like you and I who have been called by the Spirit of God to be his *"chosen and special people"* (1Peter 2:9).

There is something worth saying here; we are not only *"chosen"* people but we are also *"sent"* people. Sometimes we forget that. We focus a lot on our *"chosen-ness"* and forget that Jesus said, *"I chose you and sent you out."* He has sent us out to *"produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will last."* God can only ask us to produce fruit if he has first given us the ability to produce fruit.

God has given each of us, as individuals and as a congregation, gifts that will enable us to carry out his work and *"produce the kind of fruit that will last."* To some, he has given the gift of helping people who are hurting; to others, the ability to say just the right words that soothe and comfort. To some, God has given the gift of patience to help the elderly and the sick. To some, God has given the gift of business skills, to others, the gift to teach children and lead them closer to Jesus, and, to others, the ability to relate in a meaningful way to teenagers. And so we could go on.

What are the gifts that God has given to you as an individual? If we believe that God has chosen us, then we can be sure that God has given us gifts to enable us to be sent out to produce the kind of fruit that will last. God has not chosen us to sit back and enjoy the ride. God has chosen us, given us gifts and now sends us out to make a difference in people's lives.

But maybe you feel like you are one of those people who believe that they were behind the door when God handed out gifts. Be assured that's not true. What gifts has God given to this congregation? How will we use those gifts to produce fruit at St. Ansgar's, this community of faith?

As people of God, we struggle with finding our place in a loving service. I think, at times, we suffer from a selective memory. God forgives us when our selective memory causes us to forget that we have not only been *chosen*, but have also been *sent out* to use our gifts to produce fruit in the lives of not just the members of this congregation but also to produce lasting fruit in the lives of the people of our community.

The story is told of a young boy in the ghetto being teased by someone who said, "*If God loves you, why doesn't he take care of you? Why doesn't God tell someone to bring you shoes and a warm coat and better food?*" The young boy thought for a moment, and then, with tears in his eyes, said, "*I guess God does tell somebody, but somebody forgets.*" God places many individuals along our paths who need help. I believe that he has chosen us, not to forget, but to be the answer and produce fruit that will last in the lives of others.

Like the priest and Levite in the Good Samaritan story, at times we don't want to get involved, don't want to waste our time, don't want to risk our safety, don't want to spend our money, don't want to use our talents, and we leave it to somebody else. Because of the cross and our faith, the Holy Spirit reassures us that we are God's children, that we are forgiven and chosen. He then reminds us again that, as his chosen people, we have been sent out. It may overwhelm you, and I, too, realize that God is depending on us to do certain tasks. God is depending on us to use the gifts he has given us to touch the lives of those people around us.

- ❖ God is relying on us to be his hands to do acts of kindness,
- ❖ to be his voice that speaks comfort and encouragement,
- ❖ to be his feet that go the extra mile.

It may be overwhelming but God has given us, as individuals and as a congregation, the gifts to do his work. In the final analysis, it doesn't really matter what we think, know or believe. What matters is what we do with what has been given to us! (*Jesus said, "You did not choose me. I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will last."*)

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- We All Are One in Mission # 576
- I Want Jesus to Walk with me # 325
- Here I am, Lord # 574

Let us pray: (*prayer from National Bishop*)

Jesus, our companion, walk with us in times of trial. Let us know your presence when our hearts are breaking or we are full of sorrow. Be with us now in these long months of pandemic.

Accompany us and comfort us. **Amen.**

Happy Birthday

*Congratulations, **Amy Mason**, for this marvelous milestone (100 yrs. young) -
Peter Blair

March 7, 2021