

## GO BACK, I AM SENDING YOU.

July 4, 2010 @ St Albert CRC

### Exodus 3:1-12 MSG

<sup>1</sup>Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. <sup>2</sup>The angel of God appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up.

<sup>3</sup>Moses said, "What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?" <sup>4</sup>God saw that he had stopped to look.

God called to him from out of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"]

He said, "Yes? I'm right here!"

<sup>5</sup>God said, "Don't come any closer. **Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground.**"

<sup>6</sup>Then he said, "I am the God of your father: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup>God said, "I've taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I've heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. <sup>8</sup>And now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

<sup>9</sup>"The Israelite cry for help has come to me, and I've seen for myself how cruelly they're being treated by the Egyptians. <sup>10</sup>**It's time for you to go back: I'm sending you** to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt."

<sup>11</sup>Moses answered God, "But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

<sup>12</sup>"I'll be with you," God said. "And this will be the proof that I am the one who sent you: When you have brought my people out of Egypt, you will worship God right here at this very mountain."

Father thank you that you welcome us into Your Presence... that the ordinary places of our lives... where we work and play and feed our flocks is holy ground.

Make us more aware of Your Presence. Help us hear Your voice today... in the music, the message, in the prayers and conversations and mostly in our hearts and minds. Help us put aside distractions, to talk to you about what we're hearing and experiencing because you're here, and thank you God for the promise that when Your word goes it, it will not return empty—may it bear fruit in our lives and in this church, your church, your people in this place... in Jesus' Name. Amen.

>>> **Last summer** I read through much of the book of Acts only this time in The Message – I would encourage you to read from different versions, it refreshes it and you often notice things that you might not have before— and in the summer most of us have a little more time for reading so why not pick up a few Gospels and read them again for the first time and let them read you...

Back to my reflections on Acts, these words in chapter 7, leapt out at me... **I am sending you back --.**

**Acts 7:30-38(TMSG)**

“Forty years later, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to him in the guise of flames of a burning bush.

Moses, not believing his eyes, went up to take a closer look. He heard God’s voice:

‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Frightened nearly out of his skin, Moses shut his eyes and turned away.

<sup>33</sup> “God said, ‘Kneel and pray. You are in a holy place, on holy ground.

<sup>34</sup> I’ve seen the agony of my people in Egypt. I’ve heard their groans. I’ve come to help them. So get yourself ready; **I’m sending you back** to Egypt.’

“This is the same Moses whom they earlier rejected, saying, ‘Who put you in charge of us?’ This is the Moses that God, using the angel flaming in the burning bush, sent back as ruler and redeemer.

He led them out of their slavery. He did wonderful things, setting up God-signs all through Egypt, down at the Red Sea, and out in the wilderness for forty years.

This is the Moses who said to his congregation, ‘God will raise up a prophet just like me from your descendants.’

V34- I’ve seen the agony of my people in Egypt. I’ve heard their groans. I’ve come to help them. So get yourself ready; **I’m sending you back** to Egypt.’

*Why did that phrase catch my attention?*

I checked out the story in **Exodus 3** – that was just read...same thing! Verse 10:

<sup>10</sup>**It’s time for you to go back: I’m sending you...**

It’s time for you to go back.

*What if it’s time for the church to go back?*

**It’s time**—time is an interesting concept. In theology and in the Greek language there are 2 words for, 2 kinds of time. In our world, there is only one kind of time... it’s the ‘*from one thing to the next*’

time-- sequential, quantitative **[ ] chronological** time —**chronos**... It’s time that deceives us into imagining that we can actually control *it*, enter *it* into our Blackberries or Palm Pilots and deal with *it*, on our own terms.

**[ ] Kairos** time, *the time that hit Moses like a burning bush*, by contrast, is **QUALITATIVE** time. It’s time **that marks out, and interrupts**; it’s the right time, the opportune time – it’s a time in between, a moment of undetermined time which changes everything; in which something extraordinary; something life changing happens—like a wedding day or the loss of a loved one or a 9-eleven.

Mordecai declared to Esther ‘for such a time as this’, *seize the day* proclaims the prophet.... In John 17 Jesus says, *the hour has come*—it’s time.... We don’t really have an English equivalent for this word,

this kind of time.... except to call it **a defining moment**. God in a bush talking to Moses was a defining moment.... at age 80, *you're never too old--* he was blindsided with a kairos moment.

And it changed everything for him-- God interrupted his daily routines, his retirement plans, his chronos timeline with a directive:

**Go back. I am sending you.**

*What if God is interrupting the church's routines and plans and timelines with a directive?*

But Moses wasn't so sure about God's suggested course of action... *Why would he want to go back?*

Moses was in a place and time that for 40 years had provided him with a safe, secure predictable environment in the sheltered community of his father in law, Jethro. Moses had List on screen

Comfort

Security

Stability

Familiarity

Control

Predictability

Routine

**I am sending you back.** *Why would he want to go back?* To be...

Another screen with above list AND this list on the right, opposite it..

Uncomfortable

At risk

Confronted with Change...

Unconvention

The Unknown

Unpredictability

**Danger**

Adventure

Challenge

*I wonder which list appeals to us more?*

**It was a kairos moment for Moses...** a moment that would change the trajectory of his life.

So Moses hesitated. *This was nuts, craziness... go back to Egypt...set people free.... But God...*

*I am comfortable where I am—it's not thrilling but it's safe....*

I can't do something like that. Really, I just can't... *you know me.*

I'm just me... me, *are you sure you want me?*

YES, and your sister and your brother and **I AM with you.**

**BUT God,** Moses responds.

It's a little word. Some say it's a bad word. **But, but, but...** my kids used to turn it into a chorus. *But, but, but, but- Mom...*

**Why me?**

Because I AM with you. And I AM sending YOU.

I am sending you, **the church, my people** BACK!... *It's a word for us too.* Go back. **I AM sending you.**

*Why would the church want to go back? Why would we want to give up....*

**On screen**

Comfort	Uncomfortable
Security	Risky
Stability	Unconventional
Familiarity	Dangerous
Control	Challenging
Predictability	Unpredictable
Routine – Chronos TIME!	Adventure
Settledness	Sent
<i>Boredom?</i>	<i>Blessing?</i>

**For the ....**

*-Uncomfortable, risky, unconventional, dangerous, challenging, unpredictable adventure of being **sent** to be a blessing?*

**That's why those words jumped out at me.** They fit with what God has been stirring up in my heart and mind—unsettling me and my understanding of what it means to be church... *and not just me...* many, many others across the continent and beyond, in every form of Christian community ... *what's God up to?*

Traditional churches are declining, denominations are losing their voice in society, cathedrals are closing, more and more people seemed to be turned off by the institutional church which once held prominence and loyalty.... *what is God up to?*

*Can the message really be “Go back”?*

Even churches like The River where I am a pastor, who were **settled on doing everything possible** to attract newcomers, to make seekers feel welcome and embraced, are *beginning to wonder...*

WHY? Well, partly because, to be honest, ***we’re realizing that no matter how great we make Midian, they aren’t coming...*** Despite the fact that we have, I believe, been doing it, church for the unchurched, very well...we’ve been culturally relevant, toasted bagel scented, community friendly -- We’ve invited people to **[list on screen]** Rocks and Blues and Jazz’es in the Park, to fall family fun festivals, Christmas Carnivals, Spring Flings with flashy postcards and special attractions... we have a **Creative Team** that has designed some of the best Sunday morning experiences around—*‘church like you don’t remember it’*—we used to say... awesome worship teams, committed techies, great hospitality, volunteer staff for three children’s programs, -- dance, drama, video, music, art, puppets... God in the Movies, radio spirituality, flags, fiddles & the famous, newspaper coverage, Super Ralph, live goats in church - ***what more could you ask for?!*** It’s been great—and *truth to be told*, lots of people, mostly those once churched looking for a more contemporary user friendly experience have been coming... And generally they have been impressed. We’re **attractive!**

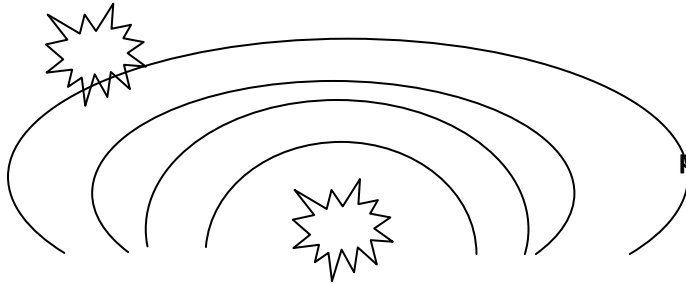
And from a traditional church standpoint, **we have also been quite successful.** We have good attendance, a high percentage of volunteers and people in groups, we meet or exceed our budget every year, we give generously to worthy causes and engage people in meaningful service...

**But, BUT *truth to be told... with few exceptions, they aren’t coming... the people across the street*** that is, who don’t know Jesus and His love. And it’s not that they haven’t been invited or that we aren’t attractive. And if you’re a seeker here today, we are thrilled and thankful and we trust that hearing about the church wrestling to understand it’s purpose and identity will be encouraging for you-- knowing that we want to do better, we want to be who God calls us to be, we want to figure out how to share the good news and the great love that we have experienced through knowing Jesus the Saviour; we want to bring the Kingdom of God near in word and deed ... *that in fact is what this is all about...*

So what is it then? **Maybe we’ve made it all too complicated...** trying to get people to come to church, trying to design the perfect programs, the best worship services, the craziest, biggest youth events, the funnest, okay, most fun children’s activities...

**Maybe it all started falling apart when Constantine** declared his empire to be Christian...and the layers began to pile up....

Here's my simplified take on it... and I am not an academic theologian, historian or a sociologist so emphasis on the simplified! *Maybe it all started falling apart* when Constantine declared his empire to be Christian...and the layers began to pile up.... here's the church, a multiplying dynamic cell....filling up homes and sending each other to fill up other homes and so on...



- And then those multiplying cells were enveloped in **political status and power when Constantine declared his empire to be Christian;**

- The Church in China, India, Korea and so on is like this today and Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world as 1000s come to Christ daily in these nations, houses fill up and multiply and the Gospel spreads like a virus...

- But for those under Constantine's influence, the church became a **system** and an **institution** and a **hierarchy** and **denominations with staff/clergy and buildings and programs and Sunday morning focus...**

- Layers and layers just built up and soon it **became hard** for the people on the inside to get out and people on the outside to get in and many on the outside began to wonder if there was anything worth getting into on the inside and those on the inside forgot why they were here and what they were really about... because they were so busy maintaining the structures and buildings and forms, clergy and programs and...

**Acts 1:8(NLT)**

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

- and God said...

**Go back.... Maybe, GO BACK is a word for us too... GO BACK, I AM SENDING YOU...** at least that what the blazing bush in my corner seems to saying, and I HAVE TAKEN OFF MY SANDALS... cause the words

are stopping me in my tracks... because the God who speaks from burning bushes and still small voices and mighty winds and angels... IS the sending God, the going God.

Have you ever thought about that? That **God is missional.**

He **SENT** Moses- Now go, for **I am sending you** to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.”

Exodus 3:10

God **SENT** Joseph- **God sent me** on ahead to pave the way and make sure there was a remnant in the land, to save your lives in an amazing act of deliverance. **Genesis 45:7**

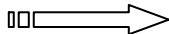
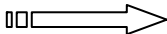
He **SENT** Gideon- Then the LORD turned to him and said, “**Go** with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. **I am sending you!**” Judges 6:14

He **SENT** Ezekiel - Son of man,” he said, “**I am sending you** to the nation of Israel, a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me. Ezekiel 2:3

He spoke to Isaiah, asking, “Who shall I send?” ... *Here I am send me.*

{not on screen] And on and on...God sent Abraham and Esther and Ruth and Deborah and Joshua and Jonah and all the prophets (2 Chron.24:19) and...

### **THEN GOD THE FATHER SENT THE SON.**

Father  Son 

**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. (John 3:16-17)**

But God **showed his great love for us by sending Christ** to die for us while we were still sinners. <sup>9</sup>And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. **Romans 5:8 - 9**

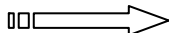
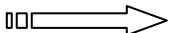
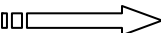
**God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son** into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. **1 John 4:9**

[Jesus] told them, “Don’t you realize that there are yet other villages where I have to tell the Message of God’s kingdom, that this is the work God sent me to do?” **Luke 4:43**

**God is a sending and sent God...**

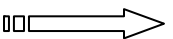
After dying and rising again...

### **THE FATHER AND THE SON SENT THE SPIRIT.**

Father  Son  Holy Spirit 

“When the Counselor comes, whom **I will send to you** from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” (John 15:26)

### **AND THE SPIRIT SENDS US.**

Father  Son  Holy Spirit  Me 

#### **Jesus repeatedly told His followers:**

“Look, **I am sending you** out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.  
Matthew 10:16, Luke 10:3

And he called his twelve disciples together and began **sending them out** two by two, giving them authority to cast out evil spirits. **Mark 6:7**

Again Jesus said... ‘As the Father has sent me, **I am sending you**’. And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’. John 20:21, 22

Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” John 20:21

**Jesus talking with the Father:** Just as you sent me into the world, **I am sending them** into the world. John 17:18

**To Paul** - Yes, **I am sending you** to the Gentiles ... Acts 26:17b

[new slide] **GO, GO therefore and make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19,20

We’re sent --to **Go and make disciples...** *not just to reach out but to go out.* Not just chronos time, Moses but Kairos....and to teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

Go back to make disciples... how? By teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you...and what has the Lord commanded?

Jesus replied, “**Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘**Love your neighbour** as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39)

That was the kairos moment – a burning bush for me.

We have to go back to the basics. If we want to transform lives and communities, our denominational tagline and mission statement --if we want to make disciples teaching them to obey everything He commanded... we have to go back and **love our neighbours**—not invite them to church... or to

programs or rallies...not to say a prayer, or learn the catechism, or hear a sermon... we have to do what God did... LOVE THEM.... BE WITH THEM... GO AND LIVE AMONG...

& be faithful friends and attentive listeners, gracious hosts and cheerful givers, engaged on our streets, in our board rooms and locker rooms... loving and walking alongside like Jesus did....

*We've been sent **to be God's people** where we are... like the early church... gathering in homes, eating together, doing life in community/ in & with the community—sharing our resources, our dreams, our sorrows and struggles, our hopes and joys and welcoming others to journey with us...*enjoying the goodwill of all the people*....being a community on a mission... on an adventure of becoming more like Jesus -- of sharing good news and living it...*

So maybe that's it...

That's it. Simple. Go back, I am sending you. I am with you.

**But if that's it, what implications does that have for church as we know it?**

What happens when a church replaces "come to us" invitations with "go to them" lives?--

**I don't know all the answers to that question but I do know that it could change everything...**

*... as it did for Moses.*

God said no to Moses hanging out in Midian... *to us settling in our pews and programs?*

God said no, it doesn't matter that you don't think you can speak... or that you're old or that you blew it 40 years ago...

**NOW GO.** So WHAT IF God wants Churches like St. Albert CRC and The River, to go... to go back...and live among... to be the Presence of Jesus where we are... WHAT IF we really are meant to love our neighbours—those right next door – the ones we drive by on our way to church several times a week...

*What if the mission has a church rather than the church having a mission?*

*What if we took the church- the community of grace we experience here, to the community rather trying to get the community to come to us?*

Steve and I blew ourselves **out of the vacuum cleaner** as Alan Roxburgh calls it several years ago and we've been riding the wind of the sending Spirit ever since.... and loving it!

**We began with a Christmas open house** —you could start this summer with a backyard BBQ, a front yard yak'n snak... a campfire social like we had Friday night – get to know you neighbours, not so that

you can invite them to church, so that you can be the church with and for them... that they might meet Jesus and discover that the Kingdom of God is near...

Go back I'm sending you to your neighbour—*the person right in front of your nose...*

Now that's a mind bending, unsettling, dangerous firebush of a thought...

And take note... *blazing bushes... **are hot stuff!***

And there's one more thing you need to know about kairos moments—***they are HOLY moments...***

Moments when we know we're in the Presence of God and we meet God and **take off our shoes** and stand in awe, because we realize we are on holy ground.

And when we realize we are on holy ground, may we respond like Isaiah saying, *Here I am Lord send me.* ... may that be our humble, prayerful response... as we find it in this video prayer.... Let's pray...

[video]