

JULY 26, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Sermon "Co-missioned" Mark 6:7-13, Luke 10:5-12

When I was living in Hanover about twenty or so years ago I started my journey towards ordination. Pastor Tom Jacobs was my clergy mentor and the pastor of First UMC in Hanover. One Sunday morning he said something from the pulpit that has stuck with me. This morning it is particularly relevant to our message. He said to the congregation "it's my job to represent Jesus to you, and then your job to represent Jesus to the world".

Of course there isn't a clean break between who does what, but he made a point that is incredibly urgent for every church that is in the same position ours is. We'll come back to Tom in a bit.

First let's look at our scripture. The passages may be familiar to some or even all of you. Jesus is sending His disciples out from Him to take His message of repentance to the people.

Obviously Jesus had things at His disposal that the rest of us do not. Yet even He recognized that the mission He had couldn't be accomplished on His own. He needed help. This is the whole idea of a co-mission. This morning we are going to look at two senses of this term.

The first is one that is a synonym for "sending forth with a blessing". When someone is authorized by our conference to pastor a church they are commissioned. In other words they are sent forth with the blessing of the conference to do their work. Often churches who send their own mission teams out will do this in service before the team leaves. The church prays over them, and blesses them to be sent out as an extension of that church to take their service, their mission, to those in need.

The other is exactly what it says. It is a CO mission. We have a common purpose or goal together. That's the CO of it. Matthew 28 gives the "great commission" which every believer is brought into. "Go into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." This is our common purpose. Our common goal. Which means each and every one of us in this sanctuary and watching at home have been giving our "sending forth" orders by Jesus Himself. To bring people into a faith that is transforming and lifelong. That is discipleship rather than conversion.

I want us to look at the model Jesus uses and see where we have some similarities and differences between our eras.

The first similarity is this. Jesus needed help. If we are making a church reference He would be the pastor and the disciples the congregation. In Mark He sends out 12. In Luke 72. Regardless they are sent with a message that Jesus felt needed to be spread broadly and He couldn't do it all Himself. In many instances it served as a frontload for a time He might be able to visit a town or village in person. What He needed though was representatives to bring people into His understanding of what it meant to live right before God. The message? Repent. Take your faith seriously so that it transforms life into what God intends. So it isn't just some passive statement but a heartfelt guiding force.

There is a difference though. It applies even after He ascends and the first apostles go beyond a simple message of repentance to one of salvation.

They aren't trying to change someone's entire religion. They aren't going to people who are atheist or Buddhist or Muslim or Hindu or even pagan Roman. They are going directly to their fellow Jews. Which means the people they are talking to already agree with them on who God is, what scriptures hold authority, worship rituals and practices. And on top of that they share an ethnic connection. Even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles begins in every city he goes to by starting in the synagogue where he has common ground and heritage with the people.

They are just asking people to deepen the faith they already have. And later to see Jesus as a promised Messiah. But this at first isn't outright conversion from one starkly different thing to another.

In other words, their task was probably a bit easier than the one before us.

A second difference is the hospitality culture of the day. If a stranger came to town it was expected to care for them. Not to do so was shameful and sinful. Jesus gives them this symbol of shaking the dust from their sandals as a sign of judgment if they go to a town and are rejected.

The comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah is telling. It tells us, as Ezekiel does, that those two cities' sin was harsh and violent inhospitality to the stranger. That's the equivalence here. And perhaps it was worse if they rejected the disciples because they would be offending more than unknown strangers. They would be rejecting their own Jewish people, maybe even kinfolk.

That hospitality culture though is built in and expected rapport. It was relationship built into a community even

among strangers.

We don't share that culture.

Our culture is much more suspicious. And not without reason. We have many different cultures represented in our communities and across our nation. We have a hugely diverse set of values, beliefs, and priorities. We are not one culture, one religious, or one people.

If I show up on someone's porch they have no idea who I am or what trouble I might pose to their family. If I'm thinking about knocking I have no idea what happens behind the closed door of that home. No idea what I might be getting into.

Which means we have a tougher row to hoe. Rapport and relationship aren't a given. We have to find ways to connect to others. We have to find common ground and often build relationship from scratch. Or we have to risk taking relationships we have to uncomfortable places if we're not sure how someone feels about faith and an invitation to join us in our community of faith.

Very different circumstances at work. But the call doesn't change. The mission stays the same. Every believer is commissioned to relate to the world, spread the gospel and invite others into a relationship with God through Christ. We are all ambassadors inviting people into our community of faith that helps us grow.

Another big similarity is how we are sent out. Jesus sent them with nothing but themselves. That's all they needed. The power of their ministry was in their witness.

They didn't have high tech lighting and production stages for worship, marketing consultants, branding agents, demographic studies to see what people want to hear(not necessarily what they need), or psychological strategies to craft emotions ripe for manipulation.

They had just their authentic witness. Similarly we don't have any of that stuff either. We DO have our own stories of faith. The question is whether we apply what we have for the sake and spread of the gospel. For the growth of our faith community.

Much of what we see in a corporation style church we've looked at over the last weeks. Consultants recommend planting a new church where there are already a bunch of churches because they know there is a market for people who call themselves Christians. Then it's not unlike burger joints.

Restaurants congregate in a similar place because that's where people go when they are hungry. They are hoping to gain business off of the presence of other restaurants and that they can pull business away from other burger joints to build their own brand.

And the thing is it doesn't matter if the product is healthy or actually good. If they can splash enough tasty flavors that people want and other places don't have. If they can make their space bright, shiny, and more attractive than the other spots they can pull business away.

That's not us. We must rely on genuineness and trust that the true example, light, and witness of Jesus Christ is compelling on its own for people who want the real deal. Our job is to offer it graciously and boldly. Honestly and amidst all the very real complications of life that demand deeper, more thoughtful responses rather than cliches. And that honor heartfelt questioning and doubt held in tension with a soul that is genuinely seeking answers.

The question is how seriously do we take our mission? If we look around and are disheartened by how many are in the pews we have a question. Again using an analogy Jesus uses, are we actually fishing? Are we looking to bring in people or are we just hoping they will magically jump in here on their own? In that way it's like going to a fishing hole, never putting a line in the water, and then complaining that I go home without any fish every day.

And here's where we come back to Tom Jacobs. His point is that the greatest growth agents any church has are sitting in the pews or watching online. You are the key to growth.

I don't like putting all my business out there, but here it is relevant to make a wonderfully faithful point to encourage you that you are the powerhouses of this church.

Each week here is what my schedule looks like. I spend one night with youth group, two nights in Bible study, and keep Mondays free for meetings like our board meeting last Monday. Saturdays are finishing touches on Sunday morning worship. There is study on Wednesday morning, office hours, hospital and home visitations, pastoral counseling. I teach our marital arts outreach Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday to 5:30, and Saturday mornings at 9 followed by a new community discussion group I am trying to form at a local bookstore in Green-castle. I work to have several lunchtimes a week as a presence in local coffee shops. Plus our own church dinners, breakfasts and events as well as district and conference demands.

Here is my point. If you look at all of that, simply because of my role as your pastor, where is the lion's share of my time spent? Around whom? It's around our congregation in addition to what I can drum up out in the community. But most of it is representing Christ to our church. That's a lot of hours a week.

Now think about everyone in the pew or watching at home. How much time does your role demand in terms of being here and present with the congregation vs. how much time do you have to be out and about in the larger world and community?

You have SO much more ability just given time to live into that great commission of Christ. When we leave Sunday mornings it is a great and wonderful “sending forth” every week to take your witness everywhere you go and build those connections that offer invitations to be part of this community. You have power and persuasion just by virtue of being you that I can never duplicate.

That plus this disturbing reality. In a recent survey done by the Barna group they found that the percentage of folks who would rate respect for pastors as “excellent” is a whopping 7%.

You can't go a week without seeing somewhere a pastor embroiled in some kind of scandal or abuse case. We don't have a great rep. In your circles that you travel you have the credibility. You've already built it. I can gain it, but it has to be earned.

Building a congregation takes the congregation. Jesus showed us what it looks like with His congregation, the disciples. All of us have an important role to play in furthering the gospel.

Never understate or underestimate just how vital you are to this mission. We are all ministers charged with building the Kingdom of God. Take your role and mission with courage and grace. We build one person, one soul at a time. We do it better and more effectively when everyone of us is engaging those opportunities we create and are given to be witness and a welcome to the world around us that doesn't know Christ, has stepped away from Him, or hasn't had Him authentically represented in their life.

Part of that study I mentioned also noticed an unfortunate but unsurprising trend in Christianity in America today. I leave you with this as a caution to not get pulled in to what is causing such decline in churches.

Politics is destroying the church. It has become so divisive that people, without intending, find themselves only in an echo chamber of voices that repeat what they want to hear. And the kicker is that it is taking priority over Christ, even in the church. Political divide is eroding personal spiritual disciplines and evangelism.

The question for every one of us. Especially when we are out in the world and fulfilling our common great commission is whether or not we are keeping Christ first and foremost. Do we go where He would lead us or do we get tribal because of party lines?

I truly believe that if we are intentional about this being the center of our lives, the way of Christ, we cut through the nonsense. I believe that people are surprised when they are treated with love and mercy regardless of how they align. Because THAT today is countercultural.

It doesn't mean we don't attend to civic matters. It just means that everything we do FIRST runs through the filter of Jesus Christ. When we do that suddenly we find more in common with one another than different. We build those connections like the first disciples and have moments where faith rises above all and perhaps someone who felt pushed away by the world finds their heart warmed because they have finally experienced Christ in another. IN YOU. When we embrace this the power we wield is incredible because that power comes from the Spirit.

Today and every day know that Christ sends you forth with His blessing to represent Him to the world. And to invite the world into our community of faith to grow in relationship with Him and one another.

Rod and reel

Dear Church,

The summer is more than half over. Can you believe it? School is kicking in shortly and the season of vacations pulls the curtain for another year.

This always means a return to routine. Routine brings with it its own blessing of stability. It carries reliability. Which is that fullness of time to be inviting new people into our midst.

Over the next few weeks we lay the foundation for all that is to come when that steadiness returns. Join together and let's recenter as a community. Let's get focused to be energized and intentional to build forward on the faith we have!

- Brent