

## Are you willing to be sent where few can see you?



She was elderly and wore a lavender cardigan. She gripped my arm more firmly than I thought she could. She said she had something she wanted to tell me.

I had just preached a Pentecost Sunday sermon about how the Holy Spirit commissions us all as missionaries, or sent ones, to alert others to the universal reign of God wherever we might find ourselves.

I had preached that all vocations offer us the opportunity to mirror the work of God in the world, whether it's to bring healing or justice, reconciliation or wholeness, whether to design and build, or to serve and love. And I threw in references to a few random vocations like stay-at-home parents and lawyers and nurses and union officials and artists and builders and teachers.

I had quoted Jesus' words to his followers, **"As the Father has sent me, so I send you,"** (John 20:21) and I asked the congregation, **"So, to whom have you been sent?"**

As I was leaving the church that morning the woman in the lavender cardigan took my arm and said with great determination, **"I know who I'm sent to."**

We were in the church, behind the last pew, still in the whisper zone before the hubbub of the mingling space beyond the glass doors. She told me quietly that her husband has advanced Alzheimer's and lies in a nursing home bed, his face and hands twisted and contorted, a mere shell of the man she married and loved for most of her life. She sits with him dutifully, but he doesn't recognise her. He's no longer there. She told me she was angry with God for the longest time, wondering why he allowed her husband to linger so long.

**"I used to yell at God, 'Why don't you just take him?'"**, she said softly. **"But then it dawned on me one day. This is my calling. To be by his side until the end. And when I realised that, things changed. I started to see that the facility was full of women in the same situation as me, waiting, grieving. And I started praying for them. They began to reach out to me**

***and now I'm like a pastor to these women. I love them and pray for them. I share Jesus with them. These are the people to whom I'm sent. Them, and my poor, dear husband."***

Wow.

She hasn't been sent to Africa or South America. Not to church planting or leading a strategic missional organisation. She's been sent to sit beside her unresponsive husband, and to minister to the wives of other equally unresponsive husbands throughout the nursing home.

I thought of William Wordsworth's assessment of a good person's life from *Tintern Abbey*,

***"...that best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts  
Of kindness and of love."***

And I thought this was true of the woman in the lavender cardigan. That her little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love in that unremarkable nursing home were the best portion of her life.

**Her calling.....Her vocation.....Her mission.**

And it made me wonder how many people would be satisfied with that.  
And it made me wonder whether *I'd* be satisfied with that.

I want to think I would be, that I'd believe it was as high a calling as any of the teaching or preaching or writing I do.

When we call people to see themselves as **sent ones** and inspire them to give their all to alert people to the reign of God, do we picture a dignified elderly woman in a lavender cardigan sitting by a metal hospital bed or praying with another grieving soon-to-be widow in the waiting room down the hallway?

Or do we think that the real missional types among us are those being über strategic, multiplying their ministries, replicating themselves in emerging leaders, developing new initiatives, and writing books with missional in the title, etc?

For thousands of years now missionaries have been willing to undertake thankless tasks in overlooked corners of the planet, serving unknown people for no material reward, often with little discernible effect.

Are you willing to be numbered among them? Am I? Because our dear mother-sister in the lavender cardigan is doing it right now. And humanity is built on such as these.

Rev Dr Mike Frost