

Called as Partners in Christ's Service: Our Mission of Love Christine Chakoian
John 3:16-17 First Presbyterian Church
John 17:1-6, 18 Lake Forest, Illinois
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John 3:16-17

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John 17:1-6, 18

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

‘I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ... As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.’

This fall we're focusing on mission. Last week we saw that mission doesn't start with us – it starts with God. In Mother Teresa's words, “I'm just the wire; God is the power.” “I'm just the wire; God is the power.”

Mission starts with God's power, with God's reconciling love in Jesus Christ. God sent Christ to heal our brokenness –God sent Christ to bring us home. And because it all starts with God's power and not ours, nothing can ever take that love away.

But, of course, if God's love were to stop with us, how sad would that be? Instead, we're called to share God's love with others. Here's a fun-fact: the word "church"? In New Testament Greek, that word is *ekklesia* – which literally means "sent-out ones." "Church" literally means being "sent-out" people. Isn't that what we just heard in Scripture? Jesus prays to God: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." That's why we do mission. As God sent Christ, now Christ sends us: to carry forward God's love for us ... to carry forward God's love for the world.

Which is why mission matters in our church. Every year, our Mission Committee gives away well over \$500,000 in grants to 40 different mission partners, supporting education, relief and development, and evangelism. I encourage you to learn more about our mission partners, both local and global, highlighted in the booklet in your pews. Beyond financial contributions, the Board of Deacons and Mission Committee also encourage us to give our time at the PADS shelter, Soup Kitchen, Neal School, and more. This fall, we also have a special opportunity on Saturday, October 15, to roll up our sleeves at Bernie's Book Bank – check out the details in your bulletin.

And then there's all the time and money each one of you shares in mission on your own! Every time you tutor a child, serve as a trustee, write a check, feed the homeless, call on a shut-in, you're fulfilling what St. Paul calls being "ambassadors for Christ." Each of you is fulfilling what the book of

Hebrews calls the “the priesthood of all believers.” Each of you is fulfilling Christ’s call to share God’s love.

That’s why I believe it’s not enough to hear my voice from the pulpit when we talk about mission. So for the rest of this series, we’ll ALSO hear a testimony from some of you. How YOU’VE experienced God’s love in Jesus Christ ... how YOU’VE felt the love of God nudging you to share that love with others.

It gives me great joy to welcome to the pulpit Wendy Darling to share her experience as a Rummage volunteer. And before she speaks, I want to put in a plug for Saturday’s sale. There’s a sign-up table near the church office; we still need volunteers during the week and at the sale. Please consider rolling up your sleeves! Wendy?

Good Morning!

There were many reasons why we moved to Lake Forest just over 13 years ago. Beautiful City, styled after an English town – which of course pleased my British husband – lovely beach, fine houses. And then there’s the nationally renowned rummage sale.

I tend to avoid malls, the stale air, noise, crowds. But as soon as you put crowds and price tags together for a good cause...it changes everything. It’s casual, fun, more connecting. Just as the farmer’s market is more connecting than a supermarket. It’s meeting neighbors and serving God.

Since I was a child, I have always loved garage sales and the thrill of finding a bargain. Before getting involved as a sorter and department chair of “Church Rummage”, I have to confess I was a frequent visitor to the sales. Many in the congregation have probably helped me carry those heavier objects to my car. Thank you for that. Later I was surprised to learn my distant cousins from Central Wisconsin went to the sale every year in the 80s. They came to buy bedding and blankets. They talked about the fine linens, too, and the **unique treasures** they admired from around the world.

However, it was not long before I decided that this was far more than just for my family’s benefit. Far from it.

Church rummage is an integral part of the Church’s mission, raising millions of dollars over its 66 years. This year the spring sale raised more than \$150,000 with all of the proceeds awarded to our worthy mission partners. In addition, the rummage room at the annual church Auction raises \$40,000 – about 1/3 of the Auction proceeds! All the proceeds that are raised by the sales that go a long way to serve, support and provide for those people who are less-advantaged than we are.

As a volunteer, the sale has grown to represent so much more than a Saturday morning to me, It’s a culmination of a year’s work.

Many hands are involved...First the hands of those who donate. The donations come through the church’s doors throughout the year. They are things being re-used and not ending up in a landfill. Goods are **recycled, re-used and re-purposed**. Donations range from clothing to musical instruments to housewares and furniture.

Next the hands of the volunteers. Indeed, one of the most rewarding aspects of helping out at rummage are the friendships I've made since I started working in the sorting room in January. I have seen first-hand the sacrifices by so many other selfless volunteers who give up their time to make rummage such a success. It has become more than completing a task but rather serving the Lord with my heart. The sorting room in the church basement is where we organize what's saleable and what is passed immediately to local agencies. Here I sort women's and children's clothing at the top table, as we like to call it. We make sure other items are directed to their proper departments. I had the opportunity to sort clothes with my oldest daughter, Chloe, this summer. She quickly mastered the task.

We sorted through men's clothing that was ripped, stained, and tattered—all of which is saved too. She wondered aloud why we save such worn clothing. Because people need it, I told her. She had a glimpse of 'why' we sort, and why we volunteer here.

Which leads me to the third set of hands at Rummage: those of thousands of people who have come to find the everyday things they cannot generally afford to buy at the stores. Shoes, clothing, housewares. It allows families to furnish their homes. The shoppers can set up an entire household at a fraction of retail prices.

We don't know how far reaching the **need for affordable quality merchandise** is. You only have to be close to the Church on rummage day to see the long lines snaking around the church just to understand how pivotal this sale is to the surrounding communities in the north shore and indeed far beyond. Many hands of rummage are in motion, and the pieces come together. The hands of donors who give their used goods to the church ... the hands of

volunteers who sort and box year-round, or help with set-up or the sale ... the hands of shoppers, so many grateful people who have been able to pick up basic necessities for their families that they wouldn't otherwise have been able to afford.

Many hands of rummage are in motion. But here's what else I've learned: behind all our hands, the hands of God are guiding us every step of the way... the hands of God are guiding rummage into the hands of the shoppers. ... the hands of God are helping us, guiding us to serve His will and His mission for our church. Rummage has brought me closer to God – I have felt Him guide me and direct my love of the rummage to give more.

The impact of rummage is so much more than what happens on each rummage day. The impact is like the ripples made by a stone dropping on a lake, it stretches out so much further than we will ever imagine helping thousands of people whose lives may be changed but we shall never really know or understand. However, we do this work in God's name and we know He is behind our rummage mission.

Wendy is absolute right: we do this work in God's name and we know He is behind our mission – our rummage mission, and all the mission efforts that we do in Christ's name. God's hands are helping us all, guiding us all to serve his will. And every time we do mission, it brings us closer to God, feeling God guide us and direct our love to give more.

God's hand is behind us, guiding our love, as we're sorting at Rummage or serving dinner at Soup Kitchen.

God's hand is behind us, guiding our love, as we're quietly knitting Prayer Shawls or chaperoning the Confirmation retreat.

God's hand is behind us, guiding our love, as we're serving on a College's Board of Directors or fundraising for the Symphony.

God's hand is behind us, guiding our love, as we're caring for a homebound family member or bringing food to a neighbor who is in the middle of cancer treatments.

Why does all of this matter? Because we are Christ's church, Christ's "sent out" people, here to share the love of God in flesh and blood, just as Christ did for us 2,000 years ago. God's hand is behind us, so that our hands can be used. St. Teresa of Avila once said it this way:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.