

“Deeply Formed Mission”

March 21, 2021 (wk 53)
Luke 10:38-42; John 20:19-23

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I am grateful to Laura Tobin for preaching and leading our worship last week while I finished my final paper for the first year of my Doctorate program. We have been doing a book study on *The Deeply Formed Life* and last week the topic was on Sexual Wholeness. I know that Laura has done a lot of thinking and praying about the intersection between theology and sexuality, so I figured she would be a good guide for us — and she certainly was. It’s not an easy topic in the world and especially in the church, and we were blessed by her insights last Sunday.

Next week we move to Palm Sunday – where do those Lenten days go? So this Sunday is the final instalment of our journey into a *Deeply Formed Life* before we move into Holy Week and Easter.

The 5th and final value that Rich Villodas lifts up in his book, *The Deeply Formed Life*, is the value of Missional Presence. I have heard it said that *the Church does not have a mission. Instead, the Mission has a Church*. In other words, our whole reason for being is that we are the ‘sent out ones’. When Jesus appears to his disciples after he has been raised from the dead, he says to them “*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*” He then breathes on them so that they will receive the Holy Spirit. Our whole reason for existing is to carry on the work of Jesus. But what does that mean? What does that look like? Villodas suggests that it looks like hospitality, justice, commissioning in our work, and announcing the gospel.

The practice of hospitality is not about serving tea correctly. When I was young, the UCW would occasionally have a formal tea. I remember this at our church in St. Catharines. (though I’m sure they did it here too) At each end of a formal table filled with perfect little sandwiches and pickles and little date squares and Nanaimo bars, ladies wearing fancy hats would serve tea from beautifully polished silver tea sets.

There is nothing wrong with a formal tea. I think when the risks of this pandemic are finally really low; I’d love to celebrate with a formal tea. Wouldn’t that be fun? Sometimes when we think of hospitality that’s what we think about.

But hospitality is something so much deeper and bigger. “*Because God so loved the world he sent his only son*”. Hospitality is the work of

reminding the world of that great love. When Jesus ate with the people everyone hated — tax collectors — that was hospitality.

Hospitality says that there is no one that God does not love. Hospitality says you belong, regardless of race or sexual orientation or gender identity, regardless of finances or health or what your body looks like or your address or your lack of having an address. You are loved. You belong. As Laura said last week, there is still work to do so that people genuinely feel they belong.

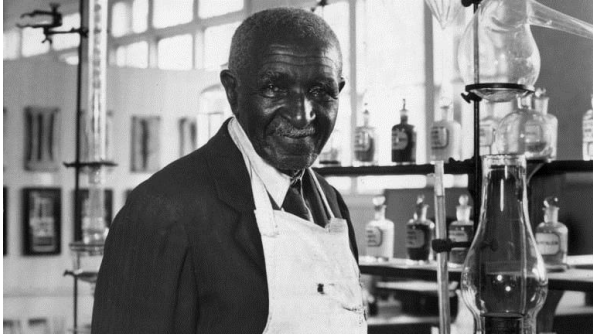
Hospitality is putting that beautiful idea into action.

The second mission of the church is the work of *justice*. This is so closely connected to the first, because when you are truly filled with love for all God's people, you can't help but work so that sin and injustice are addressed. We can't say that all races matter equally to God and then do nothing in the light of blatant racism. This past week I have been so grieved by the shooting in Atlanta where Asian women seemed to be the target. The church needs to stand up to racism and be a place of reconciliation. Remember that the work of justice often starts off small. It may be that you are called to listen deeply to someone who has experienced painful discrimination. It may be that you are called to contribute financially to an organization or to organize a study or a petition. It may be that you are called to pray.

Do you remember the story of Martha and Mary? Martha is busy with serving the guests and totally ticked that Mary is not helping her. She wants Jesus to take her side and get Mary to help, but as we know, Jesus does not. Instead, he takes Mary's side and tells Martha that Mary had chosen the better task—that of listening deeply to the master while he is present. Jesus is not saying that the work that Martha is doing is unimportant, but that for her work to be full, it needs to be fueled by faith.

The church always has a tension between the monastery and the mission field. In the monastery, monks separate themselves from the world and enter a life of contemplation. The mission field is all about going *into* the world. Every person and every church leans more one way than the other — either towards action and the outer life or towards contemplation and the inner life. But the point is not one or the other, because you can't have one without the other.

After the sermon on Racial Reconciliation a few weeks ago, someone in the church dropped off a booklet for me on George Washington Carver. I don't know who dropped it off because they didn't leave their name — but if you're reading this, thank you. It's a really wonderful story.



I had heard the name of George Washington Carver but didn't know anything about him. He was born into slavery, but ended up being raised by white people, the Carvers. Living in the South there were so, so many limitations for him because he was black. He managed to get an

education. Even going to school was not easy — he had to go to a school 10 miles away and rent from a woman, Mariah Watkins. Her words had a great impact on him. She said: "*You must learn all you can, then go back out into the world and give your learning back to the people*".

That's what he did. He worked his way through to get a high school degree. He applied to a university in the north, because he knew no southern university would accept him. He got a scholarship to a university in Kansas, but when he arrived, they rejected him because they had not realized he was Black. Finally he managed to secure a spot as a student at Iowa State College. He was the first black student there. He was encouraged to continue on and do his Master's degree which he completed in 1896.

At the turn of the last century, not many people got a university education, very few got their master's degree, and virtually none of them were black.

Carver was a scientist who did a huge amount to help farming techniques. He taught farmers that planting cotton year after year was depleting the soil of nutrients. They needed to do crop rotation. He suggested peanuts and sweet potatoes which would add nitrogen to the soil for a later cotton crop. The idea took hold, but it created its own problem when the market was flooded with peanuts and the price plummeted. In response, Carver went back to the lab and invented about 300 other uses for peanuts than just eating them — everything from medicinal oils, to cosmetics, to solvents. He really was a genius.

But what I found so interesting was Carver's faith. He became a Christian as a small boy when a friend told him about Sunday School. George asked about it and the boy told him about the games and the Bible stories and about how they prayed. George asked a bit more. George knew he couldn't attend Sunday School — there wasn't a church in the area that would allow a black child, so after the boy left George went up to the loft in the barn and did as best he could to pray. He experienced a wonderful

feeling, and so continued to pray. His faith carried on this way all his life. He had a faith that was developed in a deep private connection with God.

Carver woke up every morning at 4 am for a 2-hour prayer and devotion time, usually outdoors. He began his day by sitting at the feet of Jesus, and it was from that time that he understood what he needed to do that day.

He was a deeply, deeply spiritual man and credited his Creator with telling him the secrets of the soil and the plants. Carver knew that his work was his mission. It was totally connected to his faith. Carver knew he was nothing without his Creator. As a result, he was an incredible scientist and a healer: a healer of plants, a healer of soil, a healer of children – he seemed to have a special healing ministry for children with infantile paralysis. He also worked to heal divides between people – especially the division between races.

When we integrate our faith into our work, our roles and our volunteering, it is incredible what God can do.

One of the things I love about this church is that we strive to be both deeply faithful and deeply missional. The banners over our choir loft read *“De Profundis – Extra Muros”* or *Out of the Depths – Beyond the Walls*.

One of the gifts of this pandemic... yes there are gifts! ... is the time to step back and reflect. When we get back to “normal” what are we called to? We were so very busy in this church building prior to the pandemic ... and I think this has been an opportunity for a reset and a rethink on who and what we feel called to be.

I want to challenge you to pray in the coming two weeks for the church and for what God is specifically calling us to. We are a church full of good people and we naturally want to do it all — but we can't. If we want to be effective, if we want to really make a difference, we have to discern God's call. Our small efforts in God's hands will produce wonderful results.

The mission of the church, and our mission as Christians is to be so rooted in our faith that we get a glimpse of a call that is beyond our small needs, wants and fears. I don't know what exactly your mission is, but I know one thing: you have a mission. It might be a mission to encourage, to pray, to organize, to move tiny or giant mountains.

As we are fueled by a deep faith, may we invite others to come and experience belonging and love, to come and be healed, to come and be transformed by the love of Jesus. This is the work of announcing the gospel of Jesus. Thanks be to God.