

Our Sending God

One gospel in many cultures' clothes, and the people God made you for

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, January 12, 2020
PASSAGES	Acts 2:5-11; John 3:16-17; Matthew 28:19; Acts 15:1-29; Acts 11:22-26; Acts 10; John 4; Mark 4:1-20
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:00:00 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

We serve a sending God. The Father sent the Son, the Son sent his disciples, and both sent the Spirit. From Pentecost on, the gospel kept crossing into new peoples and cultures, and the church had to learn to clothe one unchanging gospel in each culture's clothes. God's secret weapon for reaching all kinds of people is all kinds of people — so look for the people he made you for, and the places where he is already at work.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ When God sees a problem, he does something about it: he sent his Son, and the Son sends us, with the Spirit as our power.
- ◆ Worship may be the church's premier purpose; evangelism is the one we tend to neglect. Evangelism exists to gather more worshipers.
- ◆ "All nations" means every people group on earth and every kind of people. No one is outside the reach of God's love.
- ◆ We are always late to the party. The Spirit goes ahead of us, as he did with Cornelius, so we should look and listen for what God is already doing.
- ◆ Contextualization: the gospel never changes, but it takes on the clothes of each culture. Paul refused to make Gentiles become Jews first.
- ◆ God's secret weapon is you, weird and diverse — you will reach people others never could.

- ◆ Contextual church is simple, creative, and needs no professionals: start where you already belong and are loved.

► 0:00:30

Geno warned that he would put some familiar Hope Chapel ideas “in a kind of a different package,” and that questions might arise. So he invited the congregation to text them to Mark during the sermon, for a question-and-answer time at the end. “If you shout them out, I’m going to ignore you.”

We serve a sending God

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He had the room say it with him, twice: “We serve a sending God.” Then the most famous text in the Bible:

► 0:01:51

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

JOHN 3:16–17 ↗

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“This is at the core of the character of God: when he sees a problem ... he does something about it.” His love gift to a broken world was his Son, sent to ransom us from slavery to sin and death. Before ascending, Jesus gave his own love gift to the world by sending his disciples — “and by this point you should be going, what? Because that means you and me.” Then the Father and Son sent the Spirit to empower and guide the church. “It’s not that we are sent without any tools.”

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Geno was careful: the premier purpose of the church may well be worship, honoring God, and he did not mean that if you aren’t leading people to Christ you aren’t doing the church’s work. “I just say this: leading people to Christ, or speaking the gospel to people, is difficult and it’s often neglected. But we do worship well.”

All nations

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“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.”

MATTHEW 28:19 ↗

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“All nations” — *panta ta ethnē* — means two things. Geographically, every people group on the face of the earth. And all kinds of people: different cultures, languages, ways of doing life. “There is no people group anywhere on the face of the earth that is out of the purview of God’s great love. He sees them all and he wants them all.”

Pentecost, and every nation under heaven

► 0:06:41

“Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?’”

ACTS 2:5–11 ↗

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Pentecost was one of the three great feasts, so Jews from all over the world were there. Jesus says “all the nations,” and “the very next thing we see on the calendar is all the nations. That should give us a clue that God’s serious about that.” They were all Jewish, but from everywhere. And the miracle was on both sides: the disciples spoke, and each heard in his own tongue.

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“Are not all these Galileans?” is a bit of a put-down. Galilee was country villages, cows and sheep (“no pigs”), lower status, less education, one language or one dialect. Geno offered a local version: “Can any good thing come out of Kyle?” Yet here they were, speaking every language.

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On a map he traced Luke's list — Parthians, Medes and Elamites, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya and Cyrene, Rome, Crete, Arabia — a circle around Jerusalem. "When Jesus said all nations, he meant all nations."

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Three thousand were converted that day and went home talking about Jesus (Acts 2:41), so that when Paul later traveled town to town across the Mediterranean, he kept meeting people who already knew the good news.

"We are always late to the party. He started the party. He lit the flame."

All kinds of people

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Then the gospel goes to all kinds of people: Greeks, slaves, women — groups excluded from worship in the temple, whom Paul puts right in the middle of those receiving the gospel. Geno summed up Acts as "the people of God following the Spirit of God to spread the good news about God" from Jerusalem to Rome.

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First it went to Samaria, to people the Jerusalem Jews despised — where Jesus had already spoken with the Samaritan woman, who believed differently, "and Jesus doesn't flinch" (John 4). As the gospel moves "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), those carrying it into new cultures and languages tailor their approach so people can get it. "They don't change the gospel message." In missionary talk, this is the problem of contextualization.

The Spirit goes ahead

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How do you talk to a half-Jew in Samaria about a Jewish Savior? Fortunately the Spirit fell in power, people were healed and delivered, "and they didn't have to say so much." Peter's first words in Cornelius's house were basically, I'm not supposed to be here (Acts 10:28) — "that's probably not good contextualization." Good thing the Spirit had gone ahead and given Cornelius a vision.

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“God’s calling us out into the vineyard, and we’re gonna be late to the party when we get there.” Talk of evangelism and church planting frightens people, Geno said — what will I say? “I want you to start looking and listening and praying,” to see what God is already doing.

Not “become like us first”

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When a Gentile church sprang up in Antioch, Jerusalem sent Barnabas, a man “Orthodox to the core but gracious.” He saw the grace of God among them, and also that they were untaught, so he didn’t scold; he went and found Saul — a former persecutor turned the best rabbi of the day — to teach them (Acts 11:22–26).

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But others from Jerusalem said Gentiles couldn’t follow Jesus correctly unless they became Jews: circumcision, food laws, feast days, maybe dress. “And the apostle Paul said, not just no — but heck no. Because the gospel is about freedom from the slavery to sin, and freedom from rules that have nothing to do with the truth about the gospel of Jesus.”

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The council in Jerusalem required only that Gentiles abstain from meat offered to idols, from blood, and from sexual immorality — “of the three, that was probably the hardest one” (Acts 15:1–29). “Now the gospel is set free to take on the clothes of culture differently, place to place.”

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Doesn’t it make sense to approach a Muslim businessman in Istanbul differently from a fast-food worker in Round Rock? Or a biker at the ROT Rally, a Salvadoran refugee in a border shelter, a tattoo artist on Sixth Street, a Chinese doctoral student at UT? Same gospel, different clothes — “and the reason I chose all of these is there are Hope Chapel people doing these things right now.”

God’s secret weapon is you

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“God’s secret weapon to reach all the nations is you, because you’re weird and diverse. That was a compliment.”

“If God’s gonna reach all kinds of people, he’s going to send all kinds of people.” You will connect with people Geno never could, and he with people you never could. “There’s no one-size-fits-all. There’s

only one gospel and one Jesus and one way to God, through Christ Jesus — but man, what a weird and wacky world we live in. Let's have some weird and wacky disciples reaching those places."

► 0:24:57

So the prayer for the morning: "God, open my eyes to see where you have made me different, and to see the people you've made me for." If it's doctoral students, be smart and go get them. "Let the former drunks get the drunks." If you coach soccer, bowl, teach cooking, climb, ride, love Mexican food or walk dogs, those sub-communities need people who love those things.

Expressions of Hope

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Geno showed a video from a church in Wildwood, Florida, part of the Fresh Expressions movement — begun in the Church of England and picked up in the U.S. by Baptists in Virginia and especially United Methodists. He would call Hope's versions "expressions of Hope": "My intent is not to join a movement, but to glean some ideas that I think the Lord is showing that fit us."

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In the video, church met in a tattoo parlor, at yoga, at a dog park, at a barber's chair and a Mexican restaurant. The pastor took his office door off its hinges because the community would be his office. Longtime members were skeptical at first; then people found their passion and began small communities where they already were, "coexisting beside all the normal things," sending people back and forth.

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"Release the mission force that's sitting in your pews" — that, Geno said, is a big deal to him. He named three things he likes about contextual church. It is simple: where are you already embedded, loving people who love you? It is creative, "only limited by our imagination." And "no professionals necessary — I love that a lot." Nothing was launching that day; he wanted to lift the church's eyes, and release "the spirit of the early apostolic church," looking at people with a missionary's eyes: "Oh, there's a people group right there — and they're my people."

Questions from the room

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What is the relationship between worship and evangelism? Echoing John Piper, missions exists because worship doesn't; evangelism leads to worship, and in heaven there will be only worship. If you

think of evangelism as gathering more worshipers for God, you look differently even at someone “dropping the f-bomb every other word”: God made them to worship him too.

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What are the non-negotiables when contextualizing? The person of Jesus, as the creeds confess him; the Trinity; that God must be worshiped; making disciples; the Bible as the Word of God; learning to walk by the Spirit. Mark pointed to George Patterson, who decades ago stripped church back to a few essentials in Central America, and it exploded once church no longer had to mean a building, instruments and a projector. The early church met house to house.

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Someone had been hurt by unbelievers and doubted God could use them. First, Geno said, come for prayer and healing. Then: don’t take it personally; it is Jesus and the Spirit who convince, and people are reacting to Jesus more than to us. “The most difficult thing that we do ... is get ourselves out of the way.” Jesus himself came knowing he would be rejected and prayed for those who crucified him ([Luke 23:34](#)), and the parable of the soils warns that most will not receive the word at first ([Mark 4:1–20](#)). Keep loving and praying.

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Is anyone in Texas doing this? Not formally, as far as Geno knew — but he had heard some at Hope already were, and he wanted to hear about it. Mark quoted Floyd McClung: “Hold the values tightly and hold the methods loosely.” Methods that worked for decades, like the Four Spiritual Laws, deserve respect; God delights in fresh ways to bring the same gospel.

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Someone admired coworkers in a call center across a class gap. Start by listening and serving, Geno said, until they know you know them and care; then take the next step. He added that prophetic intercessors had told him Hope needed a foundation of prayer before launching out — and he asked those called to it to step up and start that movement. Those wanting to go overseas were pointed to the Hope Global team, Deb and Ceci.

Let it go

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At the close, Andrea shared a picture she received in worship: pink and white helium balloons released one at a time. She sensed that many were being deceived into magnifying an offense against another believer until it bloomed into unforgiveness — something far smaller than it seemed. She invited everyone to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anything the enemy was blowing out of proportion, and to

release it to God “like that helium balloon.” Then Geno invited anyone who needed prayer — for broken relationships, money, healing, or for what this message had stirred — to come forward.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [John 3:16–17](#)
- [Matthew 28:19](#)
- [Acts 2:5–11](#)
- [Acts 2:41](#)
- [John 4](#)
- [Acts 1:8](#)
- [Acts 10:28](#)
- [Acts 11:22–26](#)
- [Acts 15:1–29](#)
- [Luke 23:34](#)
- [Mark 4:1–20](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Geno said evangelism is the purpose of the church we most often neglect. Why do you think that is, for you?
2. Where have you found yourself “late to the party” — discovering God was already at work before you arrived?
3. What “cultural clothes” might we be requiring of people before they can follow Jesus, the way some in Acts 15 did?
4. Pray Geno’s prayer together: where has God made you different, and who are the people he made you for?
5. What community do you already belong to — a team, a hobby, a workplace — where an expression of Hope could begin, and what is one step of listening or serving you could take there this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt preached this message to cast vision for “expressions of Hope” — small contextual churches formed in the communities Hope’s people already belong to. He has a Bible degree, often reminds the congregation of a “ten-second prayer” he has taught them for listening to people, and closed the sermon by answering the congregation’s texted questions alongside Mark, before leading a time of prayer ministry.

Watch the full message:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yxs_eaL2d7Q&t=0s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.