LIGHT OF THE WORLD

God has called us to not simply blend in with the crowd but to stand out in the world. When I was a growing up, luggage did not used to have wheels. Now before one of my kids makes a smart comment like, "yes, because the wheel was not invented yet …" I want to assure you that yes, the wheel had been invented, it is just that they had not put it on luggage yet. It was in 1987 that a pilot invented the rollaboard, and ever since then it seems that every suitcase had to have it.

In fact, they have become so popular that when you go to the airport these days all the bags are beginning to look alike. If you have a black suitcase with a pull up handle and wheels, you will have a hard time finding which one is yours because there are so many that look just like that. What you will often find is that smart people will put something on their bag to distinguish it from all the others. There will be a bright neon string tied on to the handle or a bright belt holding it shut. As soon as it comes off the conveyor belt it is easy to identify which bag is yours. You do that so that it will get noticed.

Because of Jesus, we are different. We are called to stand out in the world, to act differently than the rest of the people around us. We are called to live counter culturally. Today we want to start a new series looking at Counter-Culture Living.

Php 2:13-16 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. 14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life -- in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

In chapter 2 vs 5 of Philippians, Paul writes that we should follow the example of Christ. Jesus should be our example in everything we say and do. So, what does that look like? From this passage of scripture, we see that it means a change in our perspective, in how we view ourselves. This means understanding 4 important truths;

1. We are Sent

It says in verse 13 that it is God, "who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." That means that our life is not our own. We live according to God's will and act according to his purpose for our lives. This makes us different than people around us.

As a church we support several missionaries globally as well as a number of outreach programs locally. Over the years we have sent people out on short term mission trips. How many here have ever gone on a mission's trip before? What was that experience like for you?

I have had the opportunity to do a lot of travelling in my life. A few weeks ago, I was counting all the countries that I have visited and the number currently stand at 44. That is a lot. Not compared to Bob Beasley who told me his number is currently 99! In 2006 I had the opportunity to visit the country of Kenya for the first time. I went there to speak at a mission's conference in the town of Nakuru. I remember walking into that church and I was taken up to the front and sat on the stage. I was not hard to find, I was the only white guy there.

The worship began and it was hoping. Everyone began to dance, and I got very uncomfortable because I knew that if I tried to do that it would not look good. At that moment I was very much aware that I was an outsider. I was different. There was no way for me to blend in and disappear into the crowd. One of these things was not like the others. I was different, and that was OK.

Do you understand that you are different? You are on a mission's trip.

2Co 5:18-20 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

An ambassador is someone who lives in a different country and represents the nation that sent them. We are Christ's ambassadors, which means that this nation that we are living in is not our home. You may be a Canadian citizen, but if you are a believer in Jesus Christ your true home and citizenship is heaven. You are here for a season representing the one who sent you, but this is not your home.

I lived in Kuwait for 10 years. One of the things that I learned by living there is what it means to be an expatriate. All the years that I lived there I knew that it was not really my home. I would not retire there; it was not my homeland. I was only there for a season.

When we lived in Brampton, the church was very multicultural. About half the people who attended Bramalea Baptist were born outside of Canada. Because of this, they saw the Canadian culture differently that sometimes we do. My ancestors came to Canada in the 1850. I am a fourth generation Canadian. Still, this country is not my ultimate home.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he found the disciples hiding in the upper room. They were afraid. They feared that they would be next to be crucified by the authorities. Jesus appears to them and says 'Peace be with you.' I mentioned this last week on Easter. Then He showed them His hands and feet to prove who He was. Notice then His next words;

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Did you catch that? Jesus was sending them, and He is still sending us today. If you are a follower of Jesus then you are a sent one. You have been sent by Jesus into the world, this is a mission's trip. Our God is a sending God. He has called us to carry His message of truth and love into the world so that everyone may hear. He has commissioned us to go. His words to Isaiah 2800 years ago are the same words to us today;

Isa 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Our response is the same as Isaiah's response then – here I am Lord, send me. Is that the focus of your life? Does that represent who you are as a person? If you get nothing else form this message today, I want you to understand one thing. Your life is a mission's trip.

When you really understand that, it will change the way you live. You will not be so concerned about things always having to go your way. Missions trips are usually difficult, that is just part of the experience. Your life was not meant to be comfortable; it is supposed to be difficult because you are different. You are going against the flow; you are sticking out like a sore thumb.

When you understand that it will change your spending habits. Why are you so interested in investing in things that you cannot keep? That is what you learn when you are an expatriate. You have been sent, you are different, so act like it! We are sent …

2. We are Sensitive

Being different is usually not the easy thing to do. Blending into the crowd and being the same as everyone else is easy. Standing out and going against the flow is always the harder path. God sends us out into the world, but it is important as we see in verse 14 that as we go, we "Do everything without complaining or arguing."

Have you ever noticed when you are travelling how easy it is to complain and make comparisons of where you are compared with where you have come from? As I travel, I see this all the time. People complaining about the food or about the sanitary conditions around them. Complaining about the strange customs and living conditions.

HGTV has a show called House Hunters International. It is about Americans looking for houses to live in around the world. I have seen the show a couple of times, and what bothers me about the show is that, in every episode I have ever seen, the house hunters turn their noses up and the living conditions of the places they are moving to. They say things like; "you cannot expect me to live in a house with a kitchen this small! Look at these cheap counter tops – they are not granite, and it does not even have a backsplash!" On and on they go about every aspect of the house.

Look, if you want to live like you are in America, then live in America. Until then, realize that the whole world is not the same as what you are used to and stop complaining!

As Christians we can be like that sometimes. We can grow uncomfortable and begin to complain about this missions' trip that God has sent us on. We are called to be different, but not in a negative way. We are called to be people of grace and unity; people who shine the light and joy of Jesus everywhere they go. Not miserable, fault finding, judgmental kill joys that complain about everyone and everything.

As one pastor recently wrote, "as our culture becomes more broken and sick, the more counter-culture we must become, and the more attractive we will be. Rather than trying to be like the culture to attract people, what is attractive today is really something completely different. In a society of anger and division, racism, polarization, meanness, rudeness, fear, disrespect and hopelessness - the Christ-like values of peace and unity, kindness, compassion, just courtesy, respect, and more, shine even more."

Do everything without complaining or arguing. Stop trying to compare this temporary home with your permanent one. You are not in heaven yet, so things are going to be messy. When we lived in Kuwait one of the things we often had to deal with was home sickness and cultural stress. When you are home sick, nothing about the country that you are in is attractive. Everything looks bad.

It is easy when we are longing for heaven to get sick and tired of this fallen world that we are living on. You see the sexual immorality and idolatry all around. You grow tired of having to explain to someone else yet again why it is that you are different, why you see things in a different way. Add to this the fact that the world grows more intolerant of Christianity by the day.

You may remember that back in 2018 the government added an attestation to the summer jobs application, meaning that you had to agree with the government's stand on abortion in order to apply. This church like so many others, could not do that so we lost our grant that summer for camps. Another organization that could not sign that attestation was Mill Stream Bible Camp near Peterborough. A few years ago, the Federal Court of Canada ruled that the Government of Canada had shown discrimination when it came to funding through the Canada Summer Jobs Program. It ruled that the Mill Stream Bible Camp had been discriminated against by the government based on their so called 'controversial church beliefs.' In that case, the Justice found that the government had denied the camp procedural fairness. In other words, the camp had been discriminated against solely on the basis of their religious beliefs. This is happening more and more.

This is the world and nation that we are living in today. Religious liberty is being eroded in our country. As this nation grows further away and more intolerant of Christianity, things will continue to become harder and harder for those who are followers of Christ. In the midst of this, we need to keep a proper perspective. We need to continue to love those around us.

1Jn 4:16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

Resist the impulse to complain and argue. We need to stand for truth and not compromise, but we need to do so in love. We are sent and sensitive …

3. We are Stars

Notice in verse 15 that God has called us to, "become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation." The words blameless and pure sit in stark contrast to the words crooked and depraved. It is black vs. white, truth vs. falsehood, right vs. wrong, light vs. darkness. We are called to live in stark contrast to the world around us. We are called to be different, and that difference should be seen by all.

Rom (MSG) 12:2 Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Notice that the attributes listed (blameless, pure, without fault) are inward character traits, not outward physical traits. There are groups that believe that in order to stand out that we need to look physically different from the world around us – like in the Amish or Mennonite communities. What is important is that we ACT differently than the world around us. That we have a different outlook, a transformed perspective.

Earlier in his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote;

Php 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...

Those are words that I have been reminded of many times in my life. All of us make mistakes, none of us are perfect. We all do a poor job in representing the love and power of Jesus in our day to day lives. But this is our standard. Whatever happens in life, live in such a way that the gospel is presented in the best light possible. Watch your conduct.

Spiritual maturity is not measured by what you know, it is measured by what you do. I think we sometimes forget that. We think that discipleship is all about taking the right classes or passing a course. Maturity is about changing what we do. It is measured by life transformation.

Are you different than the non-Christian people around you? Do people know that you are different because you act differently? You respond differently. When people are gossiping in the office, you refuse to take part in that. When everyone is fearful and worried, you have a hope and strength that stands out. In the face of cancel culture we are a culture of love. We are sent, sensitive and stars …

4. We are Steadfast

Paul ends by reminded the Philippians that they are to continue to shine, "as you hold out the word of life." The word in the Greek really gives the idea of 'continuing to hold' – which speaks of endurance or perseverance. That means that we continue to shine as stars, even when times get tough. It is easy to talk the talk, it is harder to walk the walk. True counter cultural living shows itself best in trials and tribulation.

When Naomi and I first visited Kuwait on the Doulos in 1995, we had a port orientation the first night we arrived. In that orientation we were given a bit of the history of the country.

Missionaries first came to Kuwait from Basra where they had established a clinic. They had come to the outskirts of the town where they found a hill with 3 trees on it and had sat and prayed for the city. The police came and forced them to return to Basra. A few years later the Emir of Kuwait had a daughter that lost her sight. He sent his daughter to the clinic in Basra where the doctors performed an operation and restored her sight. In gratitude, he told the missionaries that he would give them whatever they wanted. They said, "give us that hill." A clinic was established in 1910 and a church in 1912.

From the foundation of the church in 1912 until our visit there in 1995, there had never been recorded a single Kuwaiti Muslim ever become a Christian. Imagine that, 83 years of ministry without a single Kuwaiti coming to Christ. Many pastors came and served 20 or 30 years without seeing a single Kuwaiti come to Christ. The church continued to meet the need of the expatriate Christians in the country but still longed to see the day when a Kuwaiti would come to faith.

Shortly after we moved there in 1996, we saw this dream become a reality. While we were blessed to have seen the first fruit, we were very aware that we were not the ones who had planted the tree. Decades of faithful service in an extremely difficult field had laid the groundwork and prepared the way for what God was going to do.

God has called us to be different. We are called to shine the light of Jesus in this dark world in which we are passing through. We are sent, sensitive, stars and steadfast.