

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Till the Whole World Knows

Dr Dick Foth

Well, hello, what a great weekend this is here at National Community Church. We're in a series; this is the end of the series. We had three about this congregation, about the Kingdom of God characterized by naming and healing. And this week it's sending and I'm saying, Lord, send me anywhere, like how about Hawaii, then I've just, no. This is a special weekend for another reason and this is sorta just family stuff. Pastor Mark told me, reminded me today that I had spoken 22 years ago, this weekend at Union Station when there was only one site. It was Union Station, I don't know how many folks there were there, not too many. And the reason I spoke this weekend was that I was, as he put it in the bullpen, I was back up because a big deal was happening potentially and that was Lora his wife was pregnant and they thought it might be, and it was, and so I spoke. I spoke Summer Batterson was born; it was a big weekend just saying, okay.

The summer of 1945 was huge for me. World War II was coming to an end. Germany surrendered May 7th, Japan surrendered August 14th and in June, our family arrived in New York City by train from California. This is our family, this little group here. That's Oliver, my mom, Gwen, my sister Luanne and me, they called me Dickie. I was three very cute, do not know what happened. We were there. We had our passport that's the naming part. Had our name, had our birth dates, it had our place of... It was our citizenship, it was our identity. That's what naming is about. It was a place of healing for me because in June they had a scarlet fever epidemic in New York City. I got it, it went into a mastoid infection in my ears and they took me to the doctor and he said, that's going into his brain and we don't know if we can stop it, we need to do surgery. Three days later they were getting ready to do surgery and my folks had sent what they called night letters. You didn't have email or texts or any of that night letters to California for the congregations that were supporting us because we were going as missionaries and they said, pray for Dickie. And early in the morning when it was supposed to be the operation day, the doctor called my my father and said, Reverend, I'm looking at two sets of x-rays. This one shows this virulent infection from several days ago, and the one I just took shows nothing at all. I don't know what kind of a God you serve, but this is tremendous. So the healing part came into play for me when I was three. I didn't understand the theological thing or anything like that. I just knew that it was better than before, right.

And then we were sent, New York Harbor was a place that saw sending for the last four years from '41 to '45 3 million United States soldiers and sailors sailed on mission out of New York Harbor. Their mission was to win a war. Their mission was to overwhelm evil. Their mission was to liberate captives and now a little family of four was off to do the same, if you will. I had no idea what sending was about, I'm three for pete's sake, no idea, but we had been commissioned, prayed over and were being sent on a Swedish liner called the MS Gripsholm. MS Gripsholm had been a liner and then they made it into a troop carrier, a ship. And we sailed on that ship to Pireis, Greece, Naples, Italy, Haifa, Palestine, Alexandria, Egypt and Bombay, India. Why? Because we had been sent.

Naming, healing sending is what the kingdom is about, it's what NCC is about and I was just thinking how many NCC'ers, how many folks from National Community Church have come through here over the last 20 some years through Union Station, Ebenezers, Potomac Yard, Ballston, Georgetown, Lincoln, Kingstown, Miracle, Gainesville, Echo now Capital Turnaround. How many are scattered around the the world, scattered over the face of the earth. In every strata of society, not just in government there are people who are plumbers, there are people who are teachers, there are people who work in all strata of life, people in the carpenters' union, people, just all of these places and there were living lives, they're living lives because they were touched here. They saw transformation here in this space called National Community Church.

Two or three years ago I was flying out here to speak and I sat down on the window seat in the exit aisle I like a little room for my legs. Young man from Pakistan came and sat next to me and I didn't feel like talking, I don't know if you fly very much, but sometimes you just don't feel like talking. And for a talker, like me, I'm a guy who finds out what he's thinking even as he speaks. You know, not talking is pretty... but I thought, you know, I'm just tired. So I had the headphones on and I was just, but then when the drinks came, you know, I got my, whatever it was tonic with lime is my drink of choice. As I'm sitting there and we start chatting and I could tell that the young woman on the aisle was listening and pretty soon she leaned over and said, excuse me, are you Dick Foth? And I'm saying, how do you know that? She said, cause I heard you speak at National Community Church years ago when they only had about 50 people and we were in one of the first small groups out there in Falls Church. You'll never know where you people are gonna show up. I'm just saying, okay. So you go from 19 to now, somewhere between three and 4,000 median age is 28 I love telling people that, but this to me is like a military training platform, a place of launching. And you say, how does that happen? It happens one way. When individuals have an encounter with the most high God. Way back from earliest times, God gets in the habit apparently of saying, come here, come, now go there. That's sort of his mode. Come here, go, there.

There's this great story that you find in Exodus. It's about a shepherd who used to be in government work. And his name was Moses, raised in the courts of Pharaoh, made a bad move, killed a guy, had to run for his life. And now he's an 80 year old dude in the deserts of the Middle East. And he goes out one day and there's a bush that's burning and it's apparently spontaneously combusting that can happen in the desert but this bush was not burning up. And this is what it says in Exodus three.

<sup>3</sup> *So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."*

<sup>4</sup> *When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"*

*And Moses said, "Here I am."*

<sup>5</sup> *"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."*

<sup>6</sup> Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

So now go Moses, come here, now go.

<sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

<sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

Now he doesn't want to go, clearly, his face is on all the wanted posters in every post office in Egypt, so he's not wanting to go there.

<sup>12</sup> And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

<sup>13</sup> Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

Now when you don't want to go someplace, you're sort of shuffling and trying to back away and this is Moses and

<sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Moses says two things in this little context; one is who am I, and who are you? When I face who he is, I discover who I am. When I face who he is, I discover who I am because I'm made in his image; you're made in his image. We look like the most high God, even though we come in all shapes and sizes and frames and colors and backgrounds, we look like him. This is not just any off the shelf God. This is not just I'm in a jam helped me out here, God. This is not in a culture that designs its God; this is a God who designs us. This is the Lord God Almighty. This is the creator of all, the all-knowing, redeemer, provider, healer, sustainer, that name above every name, the King of the universe who speaks billions of galaxies, I just heard that billions of galaxies into existence. He's the Great I Am. He's the Lion of Judah. He's the Lamb of God. He is the way, the truth, the life, the Good Shepherd. He's the King of Kings and Lord of Lord. You can say hallelujah or something there if you want, you know, I'm just saying. He calls, commissions, empowers and sends. He is the sender, we NCC is the agency if you will, is the community of faith that encourages and implements his call.

Now, Moses was nervous. I mean, if you go onto read that text, he says now I can't go to Pharaoh, I can't go to Pharaoh because I stutter. Well, I was a stutter for a bunch of years when I was a kid and up into my teen years and I just, you know, it makes you nervous and sometimes I have excuses, sometimes I say I just can't do it and it doesn't make any difference what role you're in. I'm 36 years old back in the day, long time ago and I was president of a small college and the role of a college president or a university president as someone well-put it is a person who lives in a big house and begs, cause you're going out to try to raise money for the university.

And I was going to Sunnyvale, California, it's in Silicon Valley and there's an old farmer there who owned 50 acres of pears in downtown Sunnyvale, if you're going to own 50 acres of pears, have it in downtown Sunnyvale. And people thought he's just an old farmer, he was a very cagey farmer, he was a very sharp guy. And I went and I wanted to ask him for \$1 million, this is 1979 I wanted to ask. I had never asked anybody for a million dollars. I'm nervous as a cat, but I felt the Lord was in this school, the Lord was in this thing. It wasn't about me, it was about the mission. And I sat on his porch with him and I just said a John, his name was John Stoll, I said, I've been thinking and praying about this and would you give a lead gift to this project, like of \$1 million? And I'd prayed like crazy lord help. And he turned to me, he looked at me and grinned and said, how soon do you need that? And I about passed out because like I'd prayed, but I didn't really think that, you know, anyway, that sort of thing.

And then I'm 51 years old and I'm here in D C its 1993 and I'm going to my first meeting with a senator, we just walked with various people in leadership. Many of you have heard me tell this and I'm whining as I'm going through the Russell Office building, the Senate office building saying I'm a kid from East Oakland what do I say to the United States senator? And I felt like the Lord said this to me, not like in verbal, like a voice, but I think he just sorta said Foth, here's the deal. If you speak with the King of the universe in the morning, it's not so tough to speak to the United States senator in the afternoon. And I've shared that a number of times. And so a few years ago I got a note from an NCC'er who was in an embassy in foreign service in eastern Europe and said, before I came here, I was called to the White House to brief the Obama Administration, the National Security Council on the area I was going with and I was so frightened, I was so nervous. And then I remembered that thing about if you speak to the King of the universe in the morning, it's not so tough to speak the United States senator in the afternoon. And it was great, it worked. This idea of speaking to people or being sent to people that are different than you are, like I did a little podcast a year ago, Christmas with four year olds. If you want something to scare you, be like a 76 year old guy talking to four year olds, I mean that... And so I was trying to have a conversation with them, but it was just, it was fun being with them. And I said, so what's the greatest thing about Christmas? And all these kids say getting presents. And I said, well yeah, it's great to get presents, but isn't it also tremendous to be able to give presents? And a few of them said ..., and this one little kid said, no way, you know.

So here's Isaiah, this is how he describes his encounter with God.

*6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*

*<sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.*

*<sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

*<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*

<sup>5</sup> *“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”*

And it says that one of the angels flew and put a coal on his lips and healed him.

<sup>8</sup> *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!”*

Can you imagine Isaiah in the presence of the most high God face down on the ground, I think in my imagination, not wanting to breathe, not wanting to disturb the moment. What a moment when somebody says, here am I send me. I told you the story of the senator friend I had some years ago. We went down to Concord, North Carolina, outside of Charlotte and we were at a church, they had snow, four inches of snow, which kind of shut things down and they had multiple services. We went to the first one and there were about, I dunno, 80 people there and it's big church, a couple thousand people. And the senator had talked to me cause he liked to sing gospel music and he said, Dick, I'm going to sing this song, you come up and do it with me at a certain point I'll call you up. I'm sitting in the front row and so he gets to that place and he says, and I have, someone's going to come and help me. He didn't say I have, he just said someone's going to come and help me. And I didn't know if that was my moment or what so I didn't move. And then he said, so, you know, he's going to come and help me. And I'm waiting for him to say my friend Dick is going to come and help and he didn't. And finally he said, is there anybody here who can help me? And from the back row, a guy said I will. And he got up and walked down to the front and it was a gentleman about 50 years old who had Down syndrome. And he walked up and he put his arms around the senator, put his head on his chest and by that time I'm up there duly embarrassed and we sing this together. And so the senator asks him to stay for the next two services and sing with us again. And by the time we're done, he's Frank Sinatra back in the day, you know, he's with it and, but the senator said, what would the culture be like if people across the country when asked to do something would just say, I will. I wonder if God says that. I'm going to put out this call and I wonder who's going to say I will. Here am I send me.

Jesus models it in John one and I'm going to just, I'm just going to read several scriptures. The scriptures are more important than my comments on them. Okay? I'm just gonna read several scriptures, John one...

<sup>11</sup> *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*

So the sending piece is, is linked, is based, is rooted in the eternal

<sup>12</sup> *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—*

<sup>13</sup> *children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

<sup>14</sup> *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

Everywhere in the gospels we see this. Matthew the 11th chapter, Jesus says, *come to me all you are overworked and burdened and I will give you rest.*

Matthew 28 says, *all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me, therefore, go and make disciples.* Here's that come and go piece working.

The evening of the Resurrection Day Jesus has come back from the dead and he shows up in the upper room, in the room where the disciples are and he says to them, peace be with you which is a good thing to say if you just like show up in the room. And as the father, this is what he says, as the father sent me, I'm sending you. It says that he breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they're not forgiven. And when I have taught on that particular text, I'm saying forgiveness is the message and when I forgive people, I can't do it like for eternity. But when I forgive them for something against me, it's a window on the Kingdom of God because the Kingdom of God is this forgiveness, reconciling, forgiving, reconciling place. So you say, okay, I get it, we're sent. But why? Because it's about sharing life, you're a life bringer. It's not some little creedal thing. It's not some few words or a couple of scriptures. It's that when you walk into the room, if you in fact have had an encounter with the most high God, there's something about you that is different.

I had a friend, I've talked to you about him, he was a specialist in spectroscopy, which is the use of light for scientific measurement, and he sat on the advisory board for the National Institutes of Health and he talked about coming to DC a bunch of years ago. And in talking about that, he said, I came here for a meeting of NIH advisory board, but I'd read a book by this woman who lived in Arlington, Virginia an older woman and it was just so captivating that I wanted to meet her. And he said, we agreed to meet at the Mayflower Hotel and he said, Dick, when she walked into the lobby, a different presence came into the room.

This is how Jesus said it to Martha,

*John 6:25 "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

It isn't just that we're bringing a message. It isn't that we're bringing some good social works. It isn't just that we're helping the poor, whatever it is; it's that you're actually bringing life by your presence, by your deed, and by your word.

Some years ago when I was a young pastor, I was blowin' and going and doing all these things and traveling and we had four kids under the age of seven and Ruth was at home with four kids and I'm doing all these things and we had discussions about that. I'll let you frame that in your own minds. And for my birthday one year she's poet and she doesn't run off at the mouth like I do, she actually thinks before she speaks and she wrote this for me and I carried it in my wallet for many, many years and then somehow I lost it. And this last birthday she rewrote it and gave it to me again. And it was the image of a water carrier in a third world culture, China or India where you carry a pole and buckets on the end. It's this water carrier.

"You who carry buckets of sloshing cold water on strong shoulders.

Sometimes the weight must tire you, drag you down, cause you pain

And there are those who would not understand, laugh at you, discourage you.

Even I would take your hand, slow you down, holds you back.

Water carrier, don't let any of us stop you from bringing us life."

You are a life bringer and Paul and I'm not going to read the text, but Paul in 2nd Corinthians five calls us ambassadors of reconciliation, ambassadors of reconciliation. What do ambassadors do? They represent the interests of the nation. In this case they represent the interests and the provision, the capacities of the kingdom. In this case, the Kingdom of God is salt and light and peace and patients. Think about it, salt doesn't go out there and just say, boy, I hope I can really be salty or lights as well, you know? No, they just are, if you will, and the Almighty has the authority to call and empower and send you life bringers. I've said it before; we at NCC are an agency of the sender, if you will a launch platform. We're not far from the Navy Yard in this Capitol Hill location and, and of course the Capital Turnaround is now coming online if you will. And the Navy Yard has memories for me because I have a friend by the name of Verne Clark who came here back in the late nineties as the chief for operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff; he was a three star Admiral. I used to work for his dad. And again, I don't come from any kind of highfalutin background, anything like that, but I was in this space and people came. And I had this friend named Verne Clark and one time, that's where a lot of admirals live down the navy yard tonight, and I drove him in, we'd been someplace and I drove him in and when we came through the gate, the young lieutenant, I think who was at the gate at that time, snap to attention and saluted the admiral. I dropped him off at his house and I circled back around and of course the young lieutenant doesn't know who I am, we're both in civilian clothes. And as I came out, he snapped to attention, gave me one of those, and I went, he had no idea that my full service was one semester of Air Force ROTC at Cal Berkeley in 1959 which is like a philosophy class, not in military at all, but that's one of my memories. But the other memory was when he then became head of the navy. I walked in one day and he said, Dick, have you ever been on an aircraft carrier? I said, you know when I was 17 in Oakland, California, the USS Ranger came in, I took a tour. He said, no, no, no, at sea. I said, no. He said, we need to do that. So he let me bring some of my friends and we went down to Norfolk Navy base and we get on this plane, a prop plane called a cod that they use to carry material and people out. And we strapped in with a racing harness kind of thing and helmets and goggles, that's to catch your eyeballs when they throw you off the aircraft carrier. They had goggles and a life vest and we fly a hundred miles off the coast of Virginia and land on the USS George Washington at 180 miles an hour. And you stop like in two seconds, just bam, like that. And I mean this is a huge ship an aircraft carrier and that's what NCC has sort of become. They start out as like a destroyer, a gunboat, you know, they're able to use the metaphor, able to turn on a dime, but we are now a launch platform for this. You know, this is a hundred thousand ton displacement ship, it's three football fields long, it takes six miles to stop and loads of fire, 5,000 sailors and all of this. And we got to stay overnight and I stepped out of the plane and walked into the ward room and the admiral was there and we shook his hand and then the captain, all these and I got down to the last guy and a young lieutenant step forward or maybe cap, I don't know, but he stepped forward and he said, Hi President Foth, nice to see you again. And he was a student at the college where I had been for those years and now he's the

chaplain on the USS George Washington. Cause you never know when God sends you where you're going to end up. You never know what the contacts, that's part of the adventure, that's part of the excitement. And so that night he came to me and he said, when they turn the smoking lamp down, which is navy language, I guess on the ship for going to bed, he said, we always have a prayer 90 seconds from the bridge. Would you like to do that? Would you like to say a prayer for 5,000 sailors? I said, you kidding me? I went up and for 90 seconds plowing through the Atlantic had a chance to pray God's care and blessing on 5,000 young men and women who were being sent. That's the nature of what that is.

We are ambassadors; we're all on a mission. And what we found out that day, we talked to people from the admiral to the guys fixing jets on the fantail of the ship to the cooks, there's an officer in charge of the anchor on an aircraft carrier, I had no idea, and the thing they had in common was that they all knew the mission, they all knew the mission, what they were about. And I'm thinking, we're ambassadors of reconciliation and our response to God when we have an encounter with the most high is here am I send me. We don't know where that is sometimes it's to just neighborhoods. I say just that's a powerful intimate place or a coffee group or a military base or a school or an office or the institution where you work, or a running club or a pickup basketball game or chess team, or you're a soccer mom, whatever, maybe even you're sent to your family. Sometimes being sent to one's family is the greatest challenge on the planet.

Let me close with this. I've shared this story over the years, one of my favorite, and I never hesitate to share it again. I'm a young pastor in Urbana, Illinois near the University of Illinois. I'm 28 years old and I'm a stutterer still and I get a call from a fraternity house at the university and some folks that come through, I think they were with what is called crew now, they'd come through. A number of the young men had come to faith in Jesus and they called up and said, we understand you work with young people, cause I was young, I was 28 and the young congregation, they said, would you come over and hold Bible studies for us at the fraternity house? Now this was the raunchiest fraternity house at the University of Illinois. They were on probation for sacrificing a pig in their annual spring ritual. They would sand bag their parking lot and have an orgy every spring. And so I said, okay. So I went over there and we were sitting around and talking and that went on for eight months. A number of other fraternity brothers and sorority sisters came to faith.

Eight months later, I get a call and it's an older man. He said, I'm so and so, and I understand, you know, my son John at such and such fraternity house. I said, I do. He said, he's radically changed in eight months, just radically changed, and he said, he says, it's God. What do you say, Mr Foth? I said, I say, it's God. He said, I want to talk to you. And I'm going, oh boy. He said, I'd like you to come for dinner. Well, when you throw food in the equation, you know, even if you're scared and so, I go to his house for dinner. Turns out what I would, I, you know, I'm a stutterer, so I'm this pipsqueak preacher, stutterer guy, and I'm going to that house of this full professor in journalism. He's a Pulitzer Prize winning professor in journalism. He's a political cartoonist for the Boston Globe and he's a Harvard fellow. That means he's real smart. And I'm thinking, God, must say, why don't we put the stutterer with the Pulitzer Prize winning author and see how that goes. You know, God has a great sense of humor, the King of the universe does. And so I go there, we have the dinner and I'll hurry along, and after dinner, we're sitting around and talking. It was back during the Vietnam years and the tension on campus was just



horrendous. And his son's peers had spit on everything this man stood for in his academic career. And he said, he's changed and I have been angry and I just, but tell me about this God he talks about. So I started talking about the God who is, I am the God who goes before you. I am that I am, I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the beginning, I am that God. And I got a few minutes into it and I just said, um, Fred, would you like to, would you like to know that God? And without hesitation, he said, I would. I said, you would? He said, yeah, how do I do that? I said, well, it says, if we just call on him, if we just talk to him. I said, would you like me to help you with that? Which is sort of arrogant sounding, but at the moment it seemed right and he said, I would. I said, I'm going to say some phrases out loud and you just follow me. He said, okay. I said, dear God, this is Fred, he said, dear God, this is Fred. You know my anger and my rage. You know my anger and my rage. You know the frustrations I feel, the frustrations I feel. I ask that you would come in and change my life, make me a new guy, turned me inside out. Forgive me, Lord, come into my heart. You know, I can't remember all the words, but it was short, it wasn't very long. Then I said, amen. He said, amen. And I looked up and looked at him and he wasn't looking at me. He was looking at his boy because his boy had been sent, if you will, to his [inaudible] this great gulf existed. And he looked at him and he just stood up and started toward him and he stood up and started toward his dad and they met right in front of me and they embraced and they just wept and I'm watching you know. And pretty soon he, he pushed his boy away and he said, Dick, do you understand what's happening here tonight? I said, I think I do, but why don't you tell me? And then the Pulitzer Prize winning author came out. He said, I believe that 2000 years ago, God gave his son to me. But tonight my son gave me God. Then I started bawling, I get up and I put my arms around him.

When you have a face to face encounter and you meet that God, and he shows us who he is and he says, come here and be ready to go there. When he says, who shall I send? I would pray for each one of us that we just say, here I am, send me.

Father, thank you for your grace and your mercy. Thank you for the power of your spirit to shape us, to frame our lives, that you care about not just the big sendings, but the intimate moments, the quiet nuance, the cup of coffee, the sitting with a friend. Those things are so powerful, and you call us to moments. So I thank you for this grand congregation that you've put together and the one that is scattered around the world because we're all part of your congregation called a kingdom of God. In Jesus' name. Amen.