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DYNAMISSIO

Der missionarische
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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort.

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Sent beyond

“Are you in?” so reads the caption below the title of a trendy magazine printed monthly in the small and suffering country of El Salvador. Blur is the latest, trendiest magazine. Blur: are you in? English in a Spanish speaking country! Glossy pages portray, in rich, bright colors, the people you *must* meet, the bars and discos you *must* hang out at, the hobbies you *must* take up and the diets you *must* follow if you want to be somebody in Salvadoran society. If your face does not show up in Blur, you don’t exist. Everyone who is anybody is in Blur.

The blur of the few and the reality of the great majority. More than half the population of El Salvador lives under the poverty line. El Salvador is gripped by

irrepressible violence and today is known as part of the “Triangle of death,” which includes neighboring Guatemala and Honduras. More people have died violent deaths since the civil war than during the 12 years it lasted. Hope for many comes in the shape of a long and life-threatening journey to the United States. Over five hundred people emigrate to the US every day. Some make it. Only in 2016, 60,000 minors were detained by the US border patrol. Others never made it. Parents consider it safer to pack their children in trucks behind fruit boxes than to keep them in their gang-ridden neighborhoods. Remittances are the first national income. One of the few Salvadoran exports are hundreds of girls trafficked monthly for the sex-trade.

Logically, you may ask, “What does this story of El Salvador have to do with me, with us, here in Germany?” “We’re in a mission conference, after all; not in a class on economics or international relations!” “What does this picture have to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the church after all?”

Well, in the few minutes we have tonight, I invite you to recognize that we have a part in the plight of Salvadorans, Syrians, Iranians, people from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and all who suffer today. This is a reality we cannot avoid as people created by the Community-of-Love. It is a reality we are sent into as the church, following in the footsteps of our Lord, who was sent beyond.

First, gone are the days in which what happened in some small village in El Salvador was unrelated to any other world event. If we like it or not, current-day globalization makes every one of us a world citizen. And, as in a spider web, tugs and pulls in one place are inevitably felt and determine life in another. It is true that in El Salvador, underneath the gloss of Blur, lies much darkness: injustice, oppression and corruption. And we could then easily write these off as local problems, that Salvadorans should deal with. However, the deeper you dig, the more obvious it is that these expressions of death are not mere relics of some remote and under-developed civilization. They are actually part and parcel of an ever-more extended civilization, of a complex web of world power dominated by what Walsh and Keesmaat denominate “a homogenized global consumerist consciousness” in which we all take part.¹

In this world of idolatrous consumption, we are made to believe that financial independence, autonomy in our economic decisions, and ability to spend without constraint constitute the good life and true freedom. Value, in our current world culture, is determined by the market. Everything is susceptible of being bought and sold: shoes and jewels, thoughts and rocks, sex and yes, even people. Around the world, an estimated 27 million people are held in bondage: today there are more slaves than at any other time in human history. At least 15,000 of them are forced to work in

¹ Walsh 29.

brothels and meatpacking plants in this country.² Global idolatry affects all of us. The story of El Salvador, then, is not only theirs but also ours.

Of course, when we truly face it, the pain around us, the horror of a world in rebellion against its Creator, is so bottomless, so dark, that the more we see, the more tempted we are. Tempted to give up hope. Tempted to lose faith and close our doors. Tempted to deafen our ears to the groans of the rest of creation, stretched beyond capacity by our irresponsibility. Tempted to hush the cry of men, women and children whose voices are imperceptible over the din of our crowded cities, our busy towns, and our rush to consume. Tempted to blind our eyes to signs of oppression and injustice underneath the slick varnish of progress and technology. Tempted to just see only numbers, victims, “the poor”. Tempted to remain distant and self-righteous donors. Tempted to see only statistics and projects, and miss recognizing Jesus in the face of those whose humanity and dignity are being robbed from them daily. Tempted to protect ourselves from the risk of inquiring further, getting more personally involved, and opening our homes, our churches, our borders to those our world considers disposable.

² See Germany's Slaves to Globalization
<http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-slaves-to-globalization/a-1589313>Heart of Darkness. *Inside the dangerous race to liberate tens of thousands of slaves in Brazil*. Rolling stone web site, Aug 25, 2005.

And yet, it is into this world that we are sent. The story of the world is the story of Blur. But we are sent as living expressions of another story.

All eyes were glued on him as he stood up that morning; expectation was written on most faces. After all, he was one of them, their homegrown boy; and word had been going around about him... His rough, calloused fingers, skilled in wood and stonecutting, unrolled the scroll. With the local Galilean drawl he began to read a familiar portion of Scripture. Ah, this would be a good Sabbath, comfortable like an old pair of shoes.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

These were words recorded by the prophet Isaiah to encourage the people of Israel during troubled days when their future was uncertain. They were words the crowd in the small Nazareth synagogue had heard time and time again. Soothing words full of promise of better days, days that would come with the awaited Messiah, the one God would send to aid them, the Jewish people, the insiders, the chosen ones. They perceived themselves as the needy ones that were to benefit from the promised blessings. They were the natural recipients of God's favor.

Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

Thrill ran down their backs as he announced:

Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.
All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.

Dare they believe that at last the promise was being fulfilled? That the wait was over? That, like the people of Israel in the olden days of Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, they too would be freed from the hand of their oppressor? That, as the Isaiah text continued, the day of vengeance of their God had come when God would shame their enemies and destroy them forever?

Perhaps... But wait a moment! Something wasn't quite right. Jesus had been quoting from the known text of Isaiah (the one we know as chapter 61). But why had Jesus not read that part of the text about God's vengeance on the other nations? "and the day of vengeance of our God,". Why had Jesus stopped the reading before that line? God's favor was for them, the descendants of Abraham. And surely those pagan romans, as the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Syrians of old deserved God's vengeance. Several start shifting on their rock seating. The day is beginning to feel less comfortable... Besides,

Isn't this Joseph's son?

What authority does he have to cut the reading short? What are his intentions in doing so? Who does he think he is? He's no teacher accredited by the religious leaders... How dare he depart from their official theology!

As if he had heard their thoughts,

Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum. Truly I tell you prophets are not accepted in their hometowns'".

Prophets? Yeshua Ben Joseph a prophet? But he's the local carpenter's son! This is not only uncomfortable; this is becoming intolerable!

But Jesus is not over...

I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when ... there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

What *is* he driving at? A widow, a foreigner, a pagan woman who does not belong to the people of Israel?

And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed –only Naaman the Syrian.

Too far; he is going too far! Syrians were long-time enemies of the Jewish people. The Israelites had suffered at their hands. How dare this pseudo-teacher betray his people in

such a way, siding as he does with the pagan outsiders! God's care was for them, for the chosen people, *they* are the object of God's favor!

Luke continues the narration...

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.

Jesus' teaching was outright unacceptable, proof enough that he was no Messiah! No way could he be the one sent by God to save God's people! Tempers flared.

They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff.

Obviously, Jesus' time was not up. He had work to do before being murdered, hung on a shameful cross as an example to all who saw about the consequences of confronting both Roman and Jewish powers.

But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Then he went down to Capernaum...

According to the gospel accounts, Jesus carried out most of his public ministry in Capernaum, the city where the apostle Peter lived and where there also was a detachment of Roman soldiers. Jesus healed many in that city, including Peter's mother-in-law, and also the son of a Roman centurion.

Jesus had declared publicly that he had been sent to preach, to teach, to free, to heal, to bring justice and abundant life. And contrary to the expectations of many, he

did not restrict his ministry to his fellow-Jews. He blasted their comfortable borders and reached out with his reconciling love to outsiders --outcasts, women of ill repute, hated foreigners, and even soldiers of the occupying Roman army.

Although his ministry was carried out in a pretty reduced geographical area, Jesus understood he was sent beyond. Beyond mere words into concrete action: freeing, healing, teaching, announcing the arrival of a reign ever so different for the ruling ones. Sent beyond mercy into justice: affirming and publicly restoring the dignity of women, challenging the rigid and self-serving religiosity of the church officials. Sent beyond the narrow confines of his ethnic, cultural and social circle into the broader world: welcoming hated foreigners into fellowship with him. Sent beyond comfort and security into painful incarnation to the point of shameful death in order to reconcile men and women with our Creator, with one another, and with the rest of creation. Because he knew he was sent beyond — as an envoy of God’s gracious reign that transcends all petty human borders, exclusions, and prejudices.

We too are sent beyond, as agents of God’s preposterous reconciliation. Forces like the Blur impose an individualistic culture, indifference and a self-serving approach to the tangled mess of our globalized and competitive world. In contrast, the good news of the kingdom of God inspires its citizens to dedicate their energies, abilities, and resources to a radical, communal, and creative solidarity characterized by both sacrifice and celebration. Blur tells us that what we see, measure, weigh, and value determines the boundaries of what is possible. In contrast, the hope of the gospel calls us to

imagine, believe, live, and fight for more just and dignified possibilities for everyone. Blur leads to non-stop consumption and accumulation without regard for the future. In contrast, the community of those who identify themselves as sons and daughters of the God of the world and of history exercise the twin disciplines of simplicity and sufficiency, discerning between need and superfluous desire. They create more sustainable alternatives, reuse, recycle, and limit the use of natural resources. Blur says that the good life can be bought, lives large on consuming and seeks security through bank policies. In contrast, Jesus' followers recognize that life is a gift to be received that can only be enjoyed by sharing and cannot be secured except by giving it away fully on behalf of others so that the God of life can fulfill God's good purposes in all creation.

You see, the lie we are supposed to live by in the current globalized, consumer society, which is steadily consuming all of creation, including our very imagination, is that things as they are -current reality- the status quo - is all we can expect. What is is. And that is the end of the story. The good news of creation, the good news of Jesus' infuriating inclusion is that that is NOT so! What we see is NOT the end of the story. Another story is being told. It has been told since the beginning. Another world is possible, not because of human savvy, foreign aid, enlightened philosophy, scientific discovery - although these all make their contribution. Another world is possible because God's reign has already broken into history and into every space of creation.

Sent beyond. For some of you, that might mean staying right here, in your own neighborhood, with new eyes and a new heart. For some, it might mean going

somewhere far away. What it surely means for all of us is becoming vulnerable, engaging the realities outside our blurry bubbles with our gifts and calling alongside fellow-followers of Jesus, not because we are able to save the world but because we need to be saved from a world of over-abundance and self-reliance that hinders our capacity to allow God to tell God's story in our lives. We have received the life-giving mission of reconciliation, forgiveness, and reparation of all that sin has damaged (2 Cor. 5:18-21). We have been included in God's story and God's mission. Our vision is nourished by the story of God's good purposes revealed in Scripture instead of being enamored by the glossy images of the Blur. Our life purpose is to announce and live into God's just rule, inviting God's Spirit to free people and all of creation from our oppressive and self-sufficient independence and to restore our relationships with the Creator and with one another.

Sent beyond mere words into concrete action. Sent beyond mercy into justice. Sent beyond comfort and security into painful incarnation. May our Creator grant us all grace, may the Spirit grant us discernment, and may the risen Christ grant us courage to go beyond!