

Special Delivery

I TIMOTHY 2:1-7 NRSV ~ *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For*

*there is one God;
there is also one mediator between God and humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human,
⁶ who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time. ⁷For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*

The late Sheridan Garrison was a member and strong participant at Frist Christian Church in Harrison. In 1982, with a small group of employees, he organized American Freightways. By 2000, the company was the nation's fourth largest LTL carrier (less than load—relatively small freight. In 2001, *Fortune* magazine listed the company as one of the most admired companies in America, and *Forbes* magazine placed it on the Platinum list of "400 best big companies in America."

Sheridan was diagnosed with Parkinson's, and by 2000 realized that he soon would be unable to continue leading his company, so in November 2000, he merged with Memphis-based FedEx Corporation in what was the largest sale of an Arkansas-based, publicly held company in history. At the time, 17,000 American Freightways employees, based at 265 customer centers, provided delivery service to 40 states. FedEx kept Sheridan Garrison's employees and administrators, and the facility in Harrison became known as "FedEx West".

Today, FedEx delivers over four million packages daily. Its routes cover every U.S. street and service more than 220 countries. In order to deliver well, FedEx has over 170,000 employees, 675 aircrafts, 50,000 ground transportation vehicles, and 1,800 office locations. In contrast to the United States Postal Service, FedEx has figured out a way to make deliveries with a one-day turnaround. If FedEx knows anything—they know how to deliver!

The church may not be in the package delivery business, but she is in the message delivery business. At least that's what Jesus wanted the church to be about! In today's text, Paul puts it this way: "*I was appointed a herald and an apostle.*" A herald is an official messenger sent with a message from or to announce the arrival of an official delegate or delegation.

FedEx operates with a conviction that everyone in the world should have the ability to send and receive packages. God may not be all too concerned about packages being delivered on time, but today's text is clear: God desires all people to receive "*the message of salvation and come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 TIMOTHY 2:3-4).

God operates with a conviction that everyone should have the ability to send and receive eternal hope—and not only for some future other-worldly existence;

but also, here and now! What is God's delivery plan? Simply put—the church!

Unfortunately, sending people hasn't always been the top priority in churches and, if we're honest, in those churches in which sending out has been a priority, it's been difficult to find enough people who are willing to be sent! Maybe the church should take a few notes from FedEx! FedEx focuses on those who send and upon those who receive the packages they deliver.

When I was serving the church in Pine Bluff I was operating under a leadership model from the world of business, and was using business terminology. One year when we were planning our ministry for the coming year, I asked, "Who are our customers?" The young man who was board chair that year responded, "The members of the church."

When I was called to serve a church in Tulsa, I was responsible for establishing a ministry of Evangelism. One elder who was serving on the Evangelism committee, said, "They know we're here. We have a huge sign out front, and we have an ad in the newspaper's church page. If they want to come, they'll come."

Let me back up and repeat something I said just a moment ago: "Unfortunately, sending people hasn't always been the top priority in churches and, if we are being honest, in those churches in which sending out has been a priority, it's been difficult to find enough people who are willing to be sent!"

The church in general (which means some of the churches all of the time, and all of the churches some of the time) operate from a business dictum: "The customer is always right! And we're the customers." For several generations the church has operated as if the church is the recipient of the church's services. Everything that comes into the church basically is to stay within the church and benefit the church. As Dr. Phil would ask, "How's that been workin' out for ya'?"

FedEx customers are (1) those who send the packages and (2) those to whom they deliver the packages. FedEx is the conduit through which that delivery service is accomplished. Extending this metaphor, the church's customers—the ones we serve—are Jesus Christ whose message we are sent to deliver, and those to whom we are sent to deliver it. Key word: "SENT."

Twenty-five years ago, Janet Bernardi wrote of her generation: "Generation X", "We were born in the Nixon era and have never known national trust in leadership. In fact, we have seen corrupt leadership ever since: in everything from PTL ministries to the LAPD."¹ She had just graduated from college.

In a New York Times op/ed last November—twenty-four years later, David Brooks wrote, "Many young people feel trapped in a system they have no faith in. A student at Notre Dame wrote this: 'Because we view humanity—and thus its

¹ William Mahedy & Janet Bernardi, *A Generation Alone* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsityPress, 1994), p. 18

institutions—as corrupt and selfish, the only person we can rely upon is our self. The only way we can avoid failure, being let down, and ultimately succumbing to the chaotic world around us, therefore, is to have the means (financial security) to rely only upon ourselves.”²

After a quarter century, young people coming into adulthood still see the world pretty much the same. Only now, that first wave of awareness is fifty years old, and is beginning to effect the direction the world is taking. Essentially, they don't trust any kind of institution or organization; therefore, they don't participate. That includes political processes like voting, and it includes the church.

Imagine: the church, whose entire identity and origin is “trust”, is not trusted by a growing population of North Americans.

They are our customers. We have the goods to deliver; but all across this country, the “message of salvation and the knowledge of truth” is not leaving the warehouse. The message that *is* going out is the Prosperity Gospel and Christian Nationalism; and a “Spiritually hungry, institutionally disillusioned public” doesn't care about political infighting and isn't asking how to get rich; they just want to know how to follow Jesus.

And isn't that an amazing coincidence? We have what that “Spiritual-but-not-religious” generation so desperately wants. We know, do we not, what it means to follow Jesus? If not, we need to back up and start over.

But there is a caveat. I cannot overemphasize: a herald is “sent.” The first word in Jesus' “Great Commission” is, “Go.” One of the most basic characteristics of the “spiritual-but-not-religious” generation to which we are sent is that they won't come to us. They gave up on anything attached to the word, “church” years ago. And the most effective way to deliver our message is one-on-one.

Fritz Kreisler, the world-famous violinist, earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he wasn't able to buy it. Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, but to his dismay it had been sold to a collector.

Kreisler found the collector and offered to buy the violin, but the collector said it was his prized possession and he would not sell it. Disappointed, Kreisler asked, “Could I just play the instrument once more before it is condemned to silence?” Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. “I have no right to keep that to myself,” he said. “It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it.”

² David Brooks, “How Democracies Perish,” New York Times: Opinion (1-11-18)