

**HE HAD TO GO THERE: *THE MULTI-CULTURAL MANDATE***

**By Pastor Rae Orozco**

(The following has been adapted for use as a sermon transcript from the book, “He Had to Go There: The Multi-cultural Mandate” by Pastor Rae Orozco. All rights reserved.)

He had to go there. Jesus just had to go “there”. John 4:4 says, *“He had to go through Samaria...”*. His disciples were bewildered as to why. For good Jews would walk miles to not cross the Samaritan borderline: so feet wouldn’t touch Samaritan soil, hands wouldn’t touch Samaritan belongings, clothing wouldn’t brush against Samaritan garments, and Jewish lips wouldn’t drink from Samaritan vessels. A good Jew would never willingly go near the miserable half-breed, lawless, and doctrinally messed-up Samaritans. Except Jesus! He went there - dragging his horrified disciples with Him to a town in Samaria called, Sychar.

Jesus crossed that physical border – not because of geographic necessity, but the divine imperative of the Holy Spirit to go to a people who’d suffered from deception, racism, and discount for hundreds of years. He had to go there!

The history of the Church of God is rich in mission and mandate. A legacy written in the blood, sweat and tears of people who refused to allow the vast possibilities of God be unrealized by the confines of natural, ethnic or spiritual boundaries. Our church fathers and mothers “went there”. So much so, a southern white man, named G.B. Cashwell, traveled west to Los Angeles, California, in the early 1900s for a Holy Spirit impartation from a one-eyed black man, named William Seymore.<sup>1</sup> The Church of God movement is what it is today because its early patriarchs were willing to “go there” at any cost. As their benefactors, we thank God for their undaunted courage and tenacity. Yet, for God’s purposes to be accomplished in these Last Days, another generation of bold men and women must also “go there”!

I accepted the challenge to become Lead Pastor of a predominately white church in Tucson, Arizona almost 18 years ago. God gave my husband and me what some assumed was an impossible dream: a church filled with people of many colors, cultures and backgrounds, united by Christ’s grace and partnered together in missional purpose.

Many believed a multi-cultural and multi-lingual church in Arizona was futile fantasy. The Southwest’s history is steeped in racial and gender prejudice, independence and violence, back to the Native American tribal conflicts and the Spanish Mexican wars. A deeply entrenched demonic principality of racial hostility has ruled for hundreds of years over the desert soil. Arizonans sometimes still exhibit a *“shoot now - let God sort it out later”* mentality! In spite of this, the message of inclusion and equality in Christ resonated, running counter-culture to Arizona culture. The church grew rapidly in size and influence to include three congregations, (English language, Spanish and African Refugee) - each diverse in color and background, yet bonded together in doctrine and purpose.

It required a willingness to “go there”: to move beyond comfort zones, risk in faith, and initiate cross-cultural relationships. We had to expand our cultural competency by learning the strengths, values and wounding of different people groups. And, when inadvertently doing or saying culturally ignorant things, resolve to humbly ask forgiveness and try again.

God has been divinely present in this amazing adventure, because a multi-cultural church is Jesus' dream church. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20, *"Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you..."* NLT

A multi-cultural, multi-ethnic church is not only our missional mandate, it is a Pentecostal imperative. Acts 1:8 says, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* NLT

Fulfillment of the promise came on the first Day of Pentecost: *"And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability."* Acts 2:4-5 NLT

As the crowd gathered to see what was happening in verse 11 they exclaim: *"we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!"* Acts 2:11 NLT Dr. Fidencio Burgueno says, *"At the Tower of Babel, language divided and dispersed people – spiritual language now brought them together".*<sup>2</sup> Through the power of the Holy Spirit, people understood the message of the Gospel in their own cultural context. Spiritual language united them as one and expanded Kingdom Culture.

As the church is birthed on the day of Pentecost, Peter stood to address the crowd: Acts 2:16-18 KJV *"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.'" Pentecost was a day of prophetic fulfillment and miraculous inclusion! What was formerly reserved for a select group of male Jewish prophets, priests, and kings, was now lavishly poured out on men and women, young and old, of every nationality and language.*

However, looking at the history of the infant church recorded in the book of Acts, it seems strange that still eight chapters later – even after such a specific command to "go there" by Jesus - and the infilling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to punctuate it – no one seems willing to leave Jerusalem or their Jewish cultural comfort zones! Yet, the Holy Spirit was insistent and incessant about "going there". So, in Acts 10, Peter is confronted with the salvation and Holy Spirit infilling of a salami eating Roman Gentile named Cornelius. And finally, Peter got it: He, too, had to go "there"!

Unfortunately, over 2000 years later, Sunday remains the most segregated day of the week. The Church primarily resembles the ethnic exclusivity found in the chapters of Acts 1-9, not the boldly multi-ethnic church of Acts 10 and beyond. Perhaps it's because a multi-cultural ministry is not an easy assignment. It is difficult and sometimes messy. But Jesus still went there! And, He insisted the leaders and believers of the early church

do so, too. Our churches will never become diverse ethnically, generationally, or include women, until we all, intentionally and at all cost, resolve also to “go there”.

Mark Deymaz, in, Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church, expounds how Acts 10 became the Early Church’s pivot point. In summary, Deymaz writes that after the Cornelius incident, in Acts 11, church leaders finally became deliberate in crossing borders by sending Barnabas and Paul to the culturally and racially diverse city of Antioch. As the message of Jesus’ love reached the ears of the citizens of Antioch a literal Gospel revolution began. Gentiles of every color, and from every part of the world, including Africa, Asia, and Europe, believed in and received Jesus. They became one regardless of race, language or background. Acts 11:26 tells us it is here – in this multi-cultural, racially diverse group of people – the followers of Jesus were first called, “Christians”. Acts 11:26b (NLT) “...*It was at Antioch the believers were first called Christians.*”<sup>3</sup>

This is significant. The word, *Christian* means: *like Christ or little Christ*. We the church look most like Jesus - not when we are segregated and separated - but as Whites, Blacks, Asian and Latinos worship, serve and “go there” together. The book of Acts also reveals the church at Antioch had a missional passion for the world. Dr. Deymaz states, “*It was because the church at Antioch reflected the world that Jesus died for.*” In other words, they were passionate about the world because Christ had been passionate about them.

The Apostle Paul declares the bedrock of his doctrine and incentive for his missional fervor in *Galatians 3:28-29 (NIV)*, “*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*”

Ray Chang, President of the Asian American Christian Collaborative, said: “*In the simplest of terms if you don’t care about diversity, you don’t care about the Kingdom of God. Everything from the genealogy of Jesus to the vision in Revelation shouts diversity as a part of both the present and the eschatological vision of God’s Kingdom.*”

Jesus’ dream Church was multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and intra-generational at its infancy and it will be so in its fullest glory. *Revelation 5:9-10 (NLT)* “...*Your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God....*” A warning: if you don’t like diversity, you’re going to hate heaven!

In this day, when politics and policies separate even Christians and racial tensions foment around the world, we, God’s people, are challenged to defy a carnal propensity to divide according to color, class and political creed. Instead, we’re being called to Oneness.

Dr. Tony Evans writes in Oneness Embraced, “*The church should be a model, at such a time as this, to reveal to the world what true oneness, equality, and freedom can*

*produce... We cannot be more concerned about reclaiming the American dream than we are about letting the rule of God remake segregated churches and denominations.”*

Oneness doesn't mean sameness. It doesn't mean being color blind. Quite the opposite. Trillia Newbell, in United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity says, “*Don't be color-blind. Be color-wise.*” Oneness necessitates we recognize and celebrate color and cultural distinctives; that we honor inherent strengths, so we may collaborate together, linking arms to expand the Kingdom of God.

Unity conferences and racial reconciliation gatherings have taken place globally over the years. Preachers have preached and position papers written. Though inspiring, we must admit, too little has actually been accomplished in conquering the territory of racism and prejudice held by the devil for generations. That is because “going there” requires more from us. It means taking a good hard look at our own hard hearts and inexcusable excuses for systemic prejudice that crushes hope, quashes dreams and snuffs out lives. Jesus boldly went there – not only for the Samaritan woman – but also to bring His pretentious and privileged disciples face to face with their Biblically rationalized sins of racism and sexism. “Going there” must begin individually as a personal conviction that leads to passionate dismantling of anything contrary to Christ's Kingdom values.

Jesus “went there” not only to confront His disciples, but so the Samaritan woman could “go there” too. He so emboldened her, she fearlessly faced those who despised her in Sychar, becoming their messenger of hope. *John 4:28-29 (NLT)* She “...ran back to the village, telling everyone... ‘Could He be the Messiah?’” Going there also means being the first boots on the battleground so others can run unblocked and unhindered in their purpose.

Observing the identity-shattering impact of race and gender prejudice routinely inflicted on my own bi-racial children and spiritual sons and daughters of color, divine determination and intensive intentionality stirred me. Ensuring equity in our church discipleship programs, leadership opportunities and staff hiring became imperative. Missions and ministry travel gave unparalleled opportunity to expose young disciples to God's indiscriminate anointing and power, as ebony and ivory ministered together. But more importantly, a regal identity and ministerial confidence was instilled in them, emboldening a “let's go there together” passion. Young men and women of different languages, nationalities and backgrounds carry a multi-cultural ministry DNA and have launched out internationally to plant churches.

God is asking us to be bold uniters of people. We are being compelled by the Holy Spirit to model the power of true reconciliation, unity and inclusion. We are being summoned by heaven itself to position ourselves as ambassadors of God's Kingdom.

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 NIV, “*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of*

*reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 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." NIV*

Let's unpack these verses in the context of our multi-cultural mandate.

1. WE MUST ABANDON OUR WORLDLY VIEW OF OTHERS

Having a worldly point of view of others is simply prejudging people according to a worldly or cultural standard. If we prejudge someone, it's prejudice. If you prejudge someone because of their race, it's racism. Period.

The truth is we are all prejudice whether we're Black, White, Asian, Native American, Latino, young or old. It's our natural human inclination to assume things about others who aren't a part of our own people group. We assess and evaluate people based on skin color, age, gender, how they talk, walk, smell, dress, tattoo, pierce and even what they eat!

We've all heard and believed erroneous things that cause us to generalize entire people groups. Such ridiculous things as:

- Asians are smart and drive really bad
- Mexicans are lazy or illegal aliens
- Irish drink and fight
- Italians are all in the mafia
- Black are violent
- Whites are racist
- Women are emotionally fragile

This story may not be true, but it makes the point:

A wealthy older lady booked a room at a posh New York hotel. She headed for her room and waited at the lobby elevator. When the elevator doors opened, two African American men were in the elevator, coming up from basement parking. She hesitated at first, but then stepped in, nervously turning toward the closing elevator door. Obviously anxious, she fidgeted with her pearls and shifted her weight, feeling as though she'd never arrive at her floor. From behind, a deep voice, quietly instructed, "Lady, hit the floor." Horrified, she was paralyzed in fear. He spoke again, but more emphatically, "Lady, press the floor!" Now overcome by terror, she threw up her purse and hit the ground, sprawling on the elevator floor. There was momentary silence above her and then muffled giggles. Finally, the men said, "Lady, you need to press the button your floor is on!" They helped her back to her feet and she pressed the button to her floor, red faced and gripping her purse in embarrassment as the elevator rose. As soon as she exited the elevator, the men broke into hysterical laughter echoing up the elevator shaft as they rose to the penthouse suite. Later that evening, a hotel bellman arrived at the woman's room holding several dozen roses. A tag attached read, "Madame, we are sorry you were frightened in the elevator, but thank you for the best laugh we'd had in a year!" Signed, Eddie Murphy and Michael Jordan

We all have a propensity for prejudice. Most often it's not because we are explicitly racist but because it's just easier to minister to and hang out with people who understand us, act like us, dress like us, eat like us, talk like us, and worship like us! It's easier – but it's not God or Godly.

The church can no longer acquiesce to worldly culture, patterns or perspectives because we are not of this world. In God's Kingdom, color lines have been washed away by the blood of Jesus! Therefore, we must repent from our worldly perspective and take off the lenses stained by personal hurts, fears, and traditions. We need new lenses - ones that help us see people as Jesus, who loved so much, He crossed borders.

## 2. WE HAVE TO CHANGE TO BRING CHANGE

Before anything can happen through me it must first happen in me. The Apostle Paul rehearses God's word to him in *Acts 27:17 NIV*, "*I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles...I am sending you to them...*"

Here's the principle: before you can be sent to a people group, God must first deliver you from them! As a Jew, Paul had to be delivered from the religious legalism and racism Jews had against Gentiles. He then had to be delivered from the pain of his Jewish brother's rejection after he received Christ. For Paul could not become the bridge of the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles until he had been delivered from both.

Perhaps a resentment was instilled after you or your family experienced hurt by white people, a black person or a Latino. The devastation of a man's abuse or the humiliation of a white church lady's gossip may have made you apprehensive or bitter. In spite of it, God is calling you to be an agent of change. But you can't be that with a chip on your shoulder!

Becoming a change-agent starts by choosing to forgive in the face of bias, inequity, prejudice and racism. It takes more strength to forgive than it does to acquiesce to hate and bitterness. Forgiveness and love are risky. They demand great personal courage and a solid trust in God. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "*Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.*" He said this while encountering vicious racism and violence that cost him his life. His message still challenges us today to become change agents by bravely and intentionally cultivating the attitude of forgiveness.

For others, change starts with a personal willingness to openly repent of passivity, ignorance, and callousness, acknowledging systemic prejudice - a filthy residue in our government, businesses, churches, and denominations. For only humble repentance, without justification or blame placing, will create a new platform of trust. Then we can finish the work of "going there" together!

## 3. WE MUST INTENTIONALLY CROSS BORDERS

Years ago, Taco Bell had a slogan that said, "Run for the Border!" But it isn't just a slogan, it's a principle for winning territory for God. Jesus Christ was the greatest border crosser in history! He crossed over from heaven to our dusty earthen sod to win the

territory of our sinful hearts, according to John 3:16. God's love compelled Christ's intentionality toward us. Christ's sacrificial love compels us to cross borders. The Apostle Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 5:14 (NIV), "*Christ's love compels us...*". Love compels and motivates the "Go". Too often, we don't "go" because we don't really love.

A young pastor I was mentoring experienced a difficult time growing his ministry. As a strategic leader, hard-worker and gifted speaker, the lack of growth was discouraging. "*I'm doing everything I know to do, Pastor! What's wrong?*" he asked in desperation. I answered, "*This is the issue: you don't love your people. You don't even like them. In fact, you barely tolerate them! So, how can you lead them to Jesus? You seem to love the concept of ministry but not the object of the ministry—that is people.*"

I've heard Christians say, "*Church would be great without people!*" They mean this in fun, but it reveals a deeply flawed motivation and focus. Because the Church is about *people*. Missions is about people who are of different race or culture as us. When an Anglo youth in California, feels a passionate call to missions in Africa, but won't speak to black people at McDonalds, there's a serious a love disconnect. For it is love that compels the "Go", across the ocean and across the aisle.

In the continuing verses of John 4:6-26, Jesus sits at a well and speaks with a sinful Samaritan woman. Out of love, Jesus intentionally crossed three major cultural borders:

- He crosses over racial borders though Jews openly disdained the Samaritans.
- He crosses the boundary of gender prejudice in spite of a cultural hostility to women.
- He broke through the divide of religious pretension becoming the friend of sinners.

He did all this while His clueless disciples bought bread in Sychar. Jesus sent them to a group of people they hated for bread *He never intended eating!* Isn't that funny?! After completing their miserable task, the disciples were utterly dismayed to find Jesus talking with one of "those people". Even worse, a female one! When urging Him to eat their sacrificial bread, He refused, saying, "*Open your eyes...the fields are ripe with harvest.*" *John 4:35 NIV*. Then to add to their horror, the whole town of Sychar came rushing toward the well!

Watch how Jesus' ministered: He initiated a conversation with the Samaritan woman based on her felt need. He sat at her well and asked the thirsty woman, "*Can I have a drink?*" *John 4:7*. He then gave her Living Water. When you "*Open your eyes*" you'll identify their need. When you offer a solution to that need, like Jesus, you'll have a harvest field greater than you can imagine!

In this post-Christian world, people won't cross our church culture borderlines - we must go out to them with the culture of the Kingdom. Jesus instructed in Luke 14:23, "*Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in so that my house will be full.*" That means, go to the people who wouldn't normally come to the Jesus party. They may live next door, sit in the office cubicle across from yours, do your landscaping or work at



the pharmacy. These people are your Samaritans and you don't have to cross an ocean to sit at their well.

After a few years pastoring, I learned the government was settling refugees from the Congo, Rwanda, Liberia and other African countries near our church campus. We initiated relationship by giving welcome packages and assistance in navigating life in the United States. By connecting with them through tangible needs, we were able to connect them to Christ. A new church was birthed from those connections. They now serve and support other refugees and it has resulted in church plants across the U.S., Ghana and the Congo!

The disciples were oblivious to Jesus' missional intentions in bringing them to Sychar. Heads-down, focused on their immediate task of getting the bread, and hoping not to touch anyone 'yucky' in the process, they missed their real mission. They thought they were there for bread, but they were actually there for Samaritans.

Needing to supplement my ministry income during the holiday season, the Lord directed me to apply online for a job at a national, trendy retail store located near my home. Never having worked retail, it would be a big learning curve. As well, the store was staffed by young "20-somethings", which I haven't been for well over 20 something years. Yet, the Holy Spirit was annoyingly persistent. So, in grumpy obedience, I applied online and was called in for an interview. Upon arrival, the assistant manager, a beautiful young woman in her 20's, led me to the office for the interview. Disheartened at learning I'd make minimum wage standing on my 50-something feet all day at the checkout stations, I was eager to say, "no thanks!". But the Holy Spirit stopped me in my tracks: "You're not here for the paycheck. You're here for her." A few weeks later my beautiful boss accepted Christ into her life and is part of our church plant launch team.

God is intentionally and purposefully placing His people in settings with individuals from different generations and cultures. If we're not careful, we'll miss the God-opportunity presented in that aggravating boss, the painfully slow waitress or the strange immigrant neighbors. The reason God placed us there is so we would cross their border.

#### 4. CONSIDER YOURSELF AN AMBASSADOR

*Verse 20 He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors... (2 Corinthians 5:20 NIV)*

Multi-cultural ministry is not only Christ's missional mandate, but now it's a practical reality. The entire world is becoming multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. We are presently in one of the most spectacular global migrations ever recorded in history, according to the PEW Research Center. The racial demographics of all major nations are dramatically changing. In the United States, the Latino population has been the principle driver of demographic growth, accounting for half of our national population growth since 2000. That growth is not by illegal immigration - its growth by birth. Hispanics are now the second-largest ethnic group after whites in America. Your son or daughter has a good

chance of marrying someone named Lupe or Luis rather than Kimberly or Kevin. Get ready to mix a little menudo into your Christmas traditions!

According to the Global Migration Data Analysis Center, International migration worldwide is the highest ever recorded. Over 244 million people reside in a country other than their country of birth. Every nation in the world is experiencing dramatic demographic changes. *The mission field is literally at our door.*

We can consider the influx of new people groups into our country as an invasion, or a divine opportunity. We can focus on legal documentation or heavenly citizenry. Our commission in these last days is not as representatives of political parties or national governments, but as representatives of Heaven!

This means you are called to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. Your church, ministry, workplace and home are embassies for God's Kingdom. A Kingdom offers refuge from the violence and ravages of sin; translated from earthly culture, people receive their passports to new life and Kingdom culture!

For the Kingdom of God is and always has been counter cultural. Our God is not intimidated by Arizona's history of violence and independence any more than He is with the history of slavery and segregation in the South. Because His Kingdom supersedes Western culture and Southern culture. It surpasses Latino, Black, White, Asian and African cultures. Kingdom Culture surpasses, displaces, overrides, overrules, transforms and transcends them all!

The Church was not called to be conformed to earthly culture but transformed and *transformative*. We my friends, are not of this world – we are foreigners and aliens living according to the laws and customs of another culture – the glorious Kingdom of God. We have a multi-cultural mandate: “*Go and make disciples of all nations....*” Matthew 28:18 (NIV) So then, let us fearlessly and in the power of Pentecost, “*Go There*”!

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