

Living Out Our/Your Mission Statement

Luke 4:14-21, 28-30 Isaiah 61:1-3, 11
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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Mission statements. Whether for a church or business or civic group, they are a big deal. Or at least they can be. They can help identify and define who an organization is, their purpose and function, and what it is they hope to accomplish. A well-written mission statement, which should always be concise, can also help provide guidance and focus as that organization matures and develops. This is especially true as it pertains to making decisions about future priorities and direction.

You may be familiar with the statement used by the company you work for, or at some other organization you are involved with. But **let's look at how mission statements apply to the church.**

Concerning the role of the church in the 21st century, the currently developing understanding is that **the primary function of a congregation should be missionally-focused, moving away from the "institutional maintenance" model. What this means is that as a congregation we should focus more on being a mission outpost in our community and neighborhood, than on mere survival and just taking care of our own, as important as that is.**

Institutional maintenance (which is characterized by an inward-focus as opposed to an outward focus) is an approach to church life that many, many mainline denomination congregations find themselves in today. It is a result based primarily on dwindling church membership and financial resources. That, in turn, is partially the consequence of living in the past, in a time when all a church had to do was open its doors and people would flock in. That, of course, is no longer the case. But most mainline churches haven't adapted themselves to this new reality they find themselves in a constant survival mentality.

While a majority of churches have their own mission statement, chances are it is rarely emphasized or even known by any of their members. Or, it's so broad and vague that it doesn't really do much good.

When I arrived here almost 2 years ago, I was pleased to learn that the Acts 16:5 Leadership Team and the Session had worked on updating **College Hill's Mission Statement**, something experts say should be done every 5 years or so. Considering it to be of much value, we make sure it is printed on the front page of our monthly Newsletter and elsewhere. And as mentioned in today's Time With The Children, it is also on the cover of this morning's bulletin. Let's take a look at it now.

The MISSION of College Hill Presbyterian Church is to:

**Build an INCLUSIVE community of faith;
Receive and openly share the LOVE OF GOD;
Reach out with a compassionate voice for PEACE & JUSTICE.**

Action verbs are always important. Ours include: *build, receive and share, reach out*. Our Mission Statement includes 3 points of specific emphasis, which do indeed help define our identity of who we are as a congregation. They also help focus and give direction to our ministry efforts – those things to which we believe God is calling us to be and do.

I bring all this up today for several reasons. First, it's crucial that we remind ourselves of our calling as a congregation. Also, next weekend we are going to spend a lot of time and thought assessing our Hispanic Ministry efforts with national leaders in the Presbyterian Church. In addition, today's assigned lectionary Gospel Lesson includes Luke's declaration of what I think can best be understood as **Jesus' mission statement**.

This story is Luke's account of Jesus' very first public ministry appearance following his baptism and the time he spent facing temptation in the wilderness. With this brief story, **Luke establishes the basis for Jesus' entire ministry – a ministry of liberation!**

After gathering in the synagogue for worship, Luke tells us that Jesus was asked to read from the scroll of Isaiah. Luke suggests that Jesus deliberately sought out a particular Isaiah passage. **Luke 4:18** quotes from the Book of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Then, in a remarkably brief yet unbelievably powerful sermon, Jesus' first sermon according to Luke, Jesus simply states, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (I wish I could get by from time to time with a nine-word sermon.)

What we have at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry is Luke providing Jesus with a mission statement that will help define and guide his ministry. Luke portrays Jesus as the bringer of good news (literally the word "gospel" in the Greek). He shows Jesus bringing this message of good news to "the poor," who are described in the rest of the passage in ways that define further who they are: they are captives, the downtrodden, the oppressed, and the blind. In this biblical passage Luke depicts Jesus as announcing that *he*, through the power of God's Spirit within him, is the one to bring such liberation.

What originally were the words of an Old Testament prophet announcing Israel's liberation from exile in Babylon in the late 6th century BCE, become a self-description of Jesus' role and calling to ministry. And by extension (which is Luke's intent), this becomes a role description, a mission statement if you will, for the Christian Church. In other words, **such good news, such liberating work of the Spirit, remains the core activity of the Church** – the Christ community.

Israel had been waiting for centuries for the promised liberator, the messiah. And with just a few brief words, Luke writes that Jesus said, **“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Perhaps the most important word in this statement is the word ‘today’.** ‘Today’ is an important word for Luke. It occurs 12 times in his gospel and only 9 times in the other three gospels combined. Luke’s point is simple: **Don’t put off until tomorrow what can be accomplished today.**

On one hand, that means we must not allow ourselves to be trapped in the past. **It has been suggested that the greatest threat to congregations today are past successes that no longer work well in the present.** Perhaps we can all think of a few examples.

On the other hand, we can also be tempted to avoid doing anything today by simply dreaming of the ideal tomorrow. Someday we’ll start living a healthy life. Someday we’ll start working on that relationship. Someday we’ll take that college course. Someday we’ll start saving money. Someday we’ll address those burning issues in our lives we’ve been avoiding – and on and on and on. **Yet too often most of us do very little today to help make that future become a reality.**

Why work on changing ourselves (let alone the church or the world) today when there’s always tomorrow. Today is just another routine and ordinary day, right? Well on the contrary, one of the greatest lessons derived from our faith is that today, and every day, is an extraordinary day!

Why? Because God is with you and me *today*. God’s Spirit is empowering you and me *today*. So what are you and I, what are we as a congregation, going to do with that? Admittedly, the word ‘today’ is a terrifying word because it calls us to action *now*. Yet we are to work toward the fulfillment of our mission this very day, as well as tomorrow, and the day after that. Therefore:

- **What can you and I do today to build an inclusive community of faith!**
- **What can you and I do today to receive and openly share the love of God!**
- **What can you and I do today to reach out with a compassionate voice for peace and justice!**

That applies not only here at church, but also in our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools, in our Kendall Whittier neighborhood, and out in the world.

We can start now, today. True, we’ll never be finished with this work, for it is a lifetime commitment. Yet while there is always more that needs to be done, there will always be great, wonderful ministry moments along the way. That is what being a missional church is all about.

In closing, I’d like to give you all an assignment for this week. Write down, or at least think about, a mission statement for *your* life. Then, live out your mission. And as a congregation, let us live out our mission.

Amen.

Resources:

Brian Stoffregen (Faith Lutheran Church, Marysville, CA); William Loader; www.textweek.com