

Acting on God's Word: Mission

Micah 6:6-8
Matthew 28:16-20

November 25, 2018
Faith Community

There are four key words in our mission statement that're displayed symbolically in our logo, and then briefly described on the back of the bulletin. The four words are:

Hearing
Trusting
Acting
Sharing

We're spending two weeks on each one, starting at the top and working our way down, knowing that in reality a lifetime wouldn't be enough.

All this is designed to help you pray for your Pastor Nominating Committee and the eventual arrival of your new pastor. Hopefully he or she will see that you have a firm grasp on who you've been called to be and what you've been called to do.

Today we look at the third word, 'acting.' Your mission statement says,

"As a church family we will care for and about each other as an expression of God's love for us in Christ. We will attempt to develop closeness within the church which goes beyond differences of opinion or ideology, a closeness which shares both the celebrations and the defeats of our individual lives and our life together. Beyond the Church a basic Christian hope will focus our lives. We will be a strongly mission oriented church; our concern will be to deal with the basic needs of people."

Our New Testament reading is called the Great Commission. The resurrected Christ stands before his awestruck disciples and gives them their marching orders. It's one of the last things Christ said to his people, and it's one of our primary callings. We've got a commission.

We're told to make disciples of all nations, baptize them and teach them. And the implication is that we're not to let a person's color, background, physical condition, economic status, or anything else get in the way. This was revolutionary stuff when it was first spoken. There were boundaries all over the place that people dared not cross. There were even certain kinds of people you just didn't

associate with. But now all bets were off. This Great Commission was highly counter cultural. It was big time stuff. It still is.

Make disciples.
Baptize.
Teach.

There's no mistaking the call to look beyond ourselves.

Friends, it's the kiss of death for a church to become ingrown. An ingrown church is like an ingrown toenail: we become self-centered pains in the...foot. We're no good to ourselves or to anyone else. Instead of that, here's our chance to experience and communicate joy. A professor friend of mine likes to say that "If you can't have more fun doing God's thing than the world can do its thing, then you need to give your faith another look."

Go and make disciples of all nations, the resurrected Christ said to the awestruck disciples. (Matthew 28:19)

Not church members
Not church workers
Not team leaders

Disciples. People who are becoming more like Jesus in their character and emotional and spiritual development. People who find their worth in who they are and who they serve.

Discipleship is always:

Personal- becoming more like Christ myself.
Missional- helping others do the same.

Friends, this mission stuff could not only change the world, it could also save your lives, don't you see?

Two thousand, two hundred, and twenty-three people were on board when the great ocean liner Titanic hit the iceberg. The ship had twenty lifeboats with a total capacity of 1,178. Even though there was room for more than half the passengers, only 705 were rescued. That left 473 empty spots on the lifeboats. At least that many were alive and struggling in the water for up to forty minutes after the ship sank.

In sworn testimony at hearings held after the disaster, conversations in the lifeboats were reconstructed. In lifeboat

number one, Charles Hendricksen said they should go back to get some who were still in the water. Lady Duff Gordon worried aloud about the danger of being swamped if they were to do so. Her husband, Sir Cosmo Gordon, offered five pounds to each crewman aboard not to go back, and other passengers agreed. Lifeboat number one could've held forty. Instead, there were just twelve on board.

In lifeboat number eight, several passengers wanted to go back. One said he'd rather die with those in the water than row off and be safe, but the majority overruled him. Quartermaster Hitchens graphically described what might happen if they returned, saying that desperate, drowning people would surely take them all down, and finished by saying, 'It's no use going back for a lot of stiffs.'

One of the boats had to be bailed out, so a crewmember asked to borrow the hat of one of the men, but the man refused. Even though he was soaked in freezing water, he said, 'If I give you my hat, I might catch cold in the night air.' In the end, only two lifeboats went back- numbers 4 and 14. By the time they got there only three people were saved.¹

When Glenn McDonald, pastor of Zionsville Presbyterian Church in Indiana, tells that story he points out how similar those lifeboat conversations are to those heard within the walls of churches all too often.

"Those people aren't ever going to change, and what difference could we make anyway? We have needs right here, so let's think of ourselves for a change." You will not hear talk like that in lifeboats 4 and 14.

Friends, times like these are precisely where emotional and spiritual maturity are formed. This is where we become more like Christ. This is why we're called to be disciples and in turn to make disciples.

Pray for a church full of lifeboats 4 and 14.

Friends, as frightened by this economy as you might feel, make disciples. Those first ones were broke, with no financial security whatsoever. Some of us may be struggling with our own doubts and uncertainties. The passage says some of the disciples themselves even doubted when they were face to face with the risen, living Christ himself. They were there anyway. They heard the call anyway. You do the same. Go and make disciples.

¹ Glenn McDonald, The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Vitality (Grand Haven, MI: Faith Walk Publishing, 2007), pp. 219-220.

As angry as you may feel facing an uncertain future that you thought was in the bag, be disciples who make disciples.

Instead of turning inward, get sharply focused and run to the darkness.

It'll save your life.

It'll honor God.

It'll change the world.