



Mission Statement

Luke 4:14-21

Preached FCCW 1-24-2016

Luke says that Jesus travelled around Galilee

preaching in the synagogues and

drawing praise wherever he went.

Finally, Jesus mission leads him back to

his own hometown of Nazareth.

On the Sabbath day,

Jesus is invited to take a leading role

in the synagogue worship.

The attendant calls Jesus forward and hands him

the scroll on which was written

the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus reads aloud this passage:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He 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.

When he finished reading, he rolled the scroll back up

and returned it to the attendant.

Then he sat down.

Not because he was finished,

but because he was just getting started.

You see, in synagogue worship,

the scriptures were read while standing,

but you sat to interpret the reading to the congregation.

Jesus sits, and the eyes of all in the synagogue

were fixed on him.

When Jesus speaks, he says,

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

As the gravity of those words

settled in the silence of that room,

all they thought they knew about this hometown boy,

and all the praise they had heard heaped on him

as a result of what he did as he travelled

from one Galilean village to another,

was replaced by what that one sentence

from his own lips, had to say about who Jesus was.

Jesus says here that his life work will be defined

by what he has just read.

It will consist of healing the broken,

announcing the release of those who are in bondage,

restoring sight to those who are blind,
and proclaiming the of the fulfillment of God's purpose..

That he was the person Isaiah was talking about
when he wrote those words hundreds of years before.

Jesus was claiming this scripture as
his own personal mission statement.

That is what a mission statement should do.

It should make it crystal clear
who you are, what you do, and why you do it.

This reading outlines a mission statement
meant not for Jesus only, but for those who,
with the help of the Holy Spirit,
seek to follow in his footsteps.

It is a statement that Christians are to
live by in the here and now.

A statement that clarifies for us
what belongs and what doesn't belong,
in the life of the individual, or the church,
that is committed to following Jesus.

Here at First Congregational Church,
our Mission Statement is the first thing you see
when you open a copy of in our By-Laws.

As well it should be.

After all, everything contained in the By-Laws is meant to
support the fulfillment of our mission as a church.

And it is posted on the website so that people,
who don't know us can gain a sense
of our church identity.

Now, few people are frequent readers of the By-Laws,

or visit the website to review the Mission Statement.

That's the trouble with Mission Statements --

once they are written hardly anybody bothers to read them.

So let me read it for you:

The purpose of this church shall be to worship God,

preach the gospel of Jesus Christ,

and to celebrate the sacraments;

to realize Christian fellowship and unity

within this church and the Church universal;

to render loving service towards

this community and to the world;

and to strive for righteousness, justice and peace.

So, what this Mission Statement tells others about us,

and tells us about ourselves,

is that our reason for being a church is

to understand and nurture our relationship with God,

and to work together to make God's will

the reality that shapes our community and the world.

This is who we are and what the Spirit anoints us to do.

The mission statement ought to be

more than descriptive, though.

It should also guide the actions of the church,

and drive its decision-making process.

It is the plumb line against which

everything we do as a church ought to be measured.

By the same token, anything that

contradicts our Mission Statement,

regardless of how good of an idea it might be

in some other setting,

has no place in the life of this church.

Now, earlier in the same chapter of Luke's gospel,

is the story of Jesus

being tempted in the wilderness by the devil.

Essentially, what was happening was that Jesus

was being tempted to deviate from

the mission that God gave him.

But what happened instead was that

Jesus comes out of the wilderness with

a sharpened sense of his own purpose.

Struggles and challenges have a way of tempting us

to either deviate from our mission,

or encouraging us

to deepen our convictions and our commitment.

Jesus emerged from his struggle with temptation

filled with the power of the Holy Spirit

to do what God called him to do.

And, not to do anything other than that.

Just as our church mission statements keep us

oriented on the right path,

so does this mission statement of Jesus give us,

as his disciples, a mandate to follow.

Whatever lessens the oppression and bondage,

the blindness and inequities of the world,

is what we are called to be doing.

And whatever contributes to oppression,

bondage, blindness and injustice

we need to oppose.

Church committee meetings and Annual Meetings,
can feel just like any meeting you would find
in a corporate boardroom or town hall.

The temptation to set goals or follow procedures
which are not in line with our mission
can sneak in to our discussions and decisions.

Which is why I have this thing about
reading the church Mission Statement
at the start of every church meeting,
to ground us in our purpose for being
before proceeding with setting goals and making decisions.

And why I am pleased with the decision
to hold our Annual Meeting here in the sanctuary --
as a reminder that the so called "business" of the church
is just as much an expression of our worship of God
as is the preaching, praying and singing
that we do in this sacred space.

Because to know our mission --
to understand what God has given us to do --
and what shortcuts we ought to avoid,
need to be just as important to us
as they were to Jesus.