

Mission is Being Sent

“A Healthy Church is a Well Balanced Church”

The Primary Purpose of Mission – Part I

February 19, 2017

For those of you who might have a memory like mine, and you forgot while we have this scale on the communion table, I want to remind you that we are continuing our series looking at the four primary purposes of the church with the title of the main series being “A Healthy Church is a Well Balanced Church.” Someone else has referred to the four primary purposes of the church as being the four foundational pillars. Take any one of them away and the church will not be able to stand, or at least stand as God intended for the church to stand. The four primary purposes or pillars of the church being: Worship, Mission, Discipleship, and Fellowship (or Community). Is one really any greater than the other three? I don’t think so and there is a lot of overlap.

We started with worship because I think that’s where it needs to all start. We have to have the right view of God and ourselves, and what God has done for us through the gift of his Son Jesus Christ, for all who repent and believe, to see the other purposes in their right place. Last week we concluded looking at worship, which was mostly about worshipping God collectively as a church, what we do when we gather as God’s church, His body of Christ here at Oak Grove.

A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that there should be four movements to most worship services. They should begin with a gathering, and it’s not so much we gathering ourselves, but it is God gathering us, His people. Then there is the element of God speaking to His people, mostly through His written Word, then God’s people responding, through singing, sharing, the offering. And the worship service should close with a sending. Again, not so much we sending ourselves, but God’s sending His people out into the world. This morning we begin focusing on the sending, otherwise referred to as mission.

It has been less than two years now that we did an entire twelve week series on what it means to be missional, so we’re not going to go into as much detail over the next four weeks. We want to just focus on the Essentials! God is both a gathering God and a sending God. He gathers his people, for worship and fellowship, and then He sends them out for mission and discipleship. Again there is overlap among the four – so not one of the four elements is restricted to only the gathering or the sending.

Quite often we need to be reminded of what God’s primary purpose(s) are for His people here on earth. God needed to remind His people, the Israelites, in Old Testament times over and over again. And He needs to remind His people, Christians today, over and over again. Why? Because we’re all slow learners and a pretty stubborn bunch. There’s a reason why Jesus refers to his followers as His sheep, and it isn’t because we’re soft and cuddly! ☺

What is our primary purpose as Christians? Jesus tells us at the end of the Gospel of Matthew:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

There is a reason why it is called “The **Great** Commission!” Because it is our primary purpose, the primary mission which God has entrusted to believers during the rest of our time here on earth, however long that may be. Just as God’s purpose and mission overlap, so does ours here at Oak Grove:

Our Purpose –

To glorify God by loving Him; by loving others; by becoming and making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Our Mission –

To share the Love of Christ in our community and around the world.

We *Share the Love of Christ in our community and around the world* with the hope of becoming better disciples of Jesus ourselves and making disciples of others.

Our Scripture this morning from the beginning of the Book of Acts is from the same writer as the Gospel of Luke. Whereas his gospel was written to give us an account of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection; the Book of Acts was written to give us an account of the beginning of Jesus’ mission being carried out after His resurrection & ascension back into heaven, and the sending of His Holy Spirit upon believers on the Day of Pentecost, which really was the day the Christian Church was born.

It says “to the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:2). The word “apostle” means “sent one.” The word “apostle” actually has two meanings as it is used in the New Testament. One, it refers to Jesus’ original disciples, the twelve minus Judas but replaced by Matthias, plus Paul. That group of men had a very special and unique calling upon their lives to be identified as the original “apostles.” With that meaning those apostles will never be replaced.

The other meaning of the word “apostle” is the calling that is placed on all of Jesus’ followers, just like the word “disciple.” All true Christians are both apostles and disciples of Jesus. All of Jesus’ followers are to go out and make more disciples, while at the same time becoming better disciples themselves as they go.

There is actually a third meaning of the word “apostle” and that is those that are given the apostolic gift. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11,

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers. . .

Yes, every one of us has been entrusted by God with special gifts to be an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a shepherd or a teacher. And at the same time all of us are called to do every one of those things at different times. Yes, believe it or not there are even some evangelists among us, those with the specific gift of evangelism, sharing their faith and inviting others to come to faith. That is the primary calling that God has placed on their lives. And yet, at the same time, every one of us by the nature of our calling as Christians is called to share our faith. Some might have the specific gift of shepherding, but all of us are called to shepherd one another at different times. Same with teaching and prophecy. Prophecy as defined not so much as one who predicts future events, but one who calls us back to the foundational things of God and to what is most important to God’s heart. It is the same with an apostle.

An apostle is one whose primary impulse is to go out, to bring the message of Jesus to those who have never heard it. Paul was an apostle in every sense of the biblical definition of an apostle. Today, church planters are apostles, along with many missionaries. Those among us whose natural inclination is to go out into the community is an apostle. And yet, as Christians everyone is called to go out. Sent out by God!

As Christians we are all called to be Jesus' witnesses – starting in Judea, the area which is most immediate around us (our own family, our children, our neighbors), then to Samaria (which might be in our jobs or at school or a ministry a little ways away) and then to the ends of the earth (which we can do ourselves or support others who are doing it). We are Jesus' witnesses in both words and actions! Faith must be accompanied by deeds and vice a versa. When the two don't match up we become "hypocrites," a word which originated in the Bible, some believe that it even originated with Jesus himself.

Matthew ends his gospel with what we now refer to as "The Great Commission."

Mark ends his with:

*And Jesus said to them, "**Go** into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. Mark 16:15-16 (ESV)*

The Gospel writer John:

*Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am **sending** you."
John 20:21 (NIV)*

And Luke's gospel ends with the disciples waiting for the promised Holy Spirit, which is why he picks up with Jesus sending them out in the Book of Acts. No matter what way we want to put it, we're not following Jesus if we're not going out!

Jesus' ministry here on earth was prophesied even before his arrival. Mostly from the prophet Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and
release from darkness for the prisoners,
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to
comfort all who mourn,³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Isaiah 61:1-3a (NIV)*

Jesus' ministry has become our ministry. The apostle Paul refers to it as "The Ministry of Reconciliation:"

Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 5:14 – 6:2 (NIV)

Our primary mission is the Message and the Ministry of Reconciliation: "That God was reconciling us/the world [restoring back into relationship] to himself, not counting people's sins against them."

Paul calls us "ambassadors." Once again, that is a title used for someone who is sent or goes out. An ambassador is "the highest ranking person who represents his or her own government while living in another country." As Christians, we are called by God and then sent out to represent His Kingdom (His government) while living in another kingdom (the Kingdom of this world). It is indeed a high calling.

Jesus' command "go" can just as easily be translated as "as you go!" "As you go" throughout your daily life – at home with your family – with your spouse, your children, your grandchildren; at work with your fellow employees, your customers, the people you serve; at school as teachers or students; when you're playing sports or participating in other hobbies; in your neighborhood when you're interacting with those who live right near you; in your community – Proclaim the Good News that Jesus has come, died on the cross for the sins of all mankind, and been raised from the dead, to reconcile those sinners who put their faith in Him back to God. Bind up the brokenhearted, visit those in prison, help out the poor, comfort those who are mourning, grieve with those who are grieving, proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. "The year of the Lord's favor" is now, the time which we currently find ourselves in. There is no time after this time.

What are you waiting for? The time is now!! Go!!!

Our response song this morning, "Facing a Task Unfinished," is one we have now sung a few times. Powerful words that speak of the powerful and high calling that God has placed on our lives – our primary mission as Christians – "to go!"

