

## **“Living God’s Mission”**

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Luke 4:18-19

‘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 favour.’

Luke 10:1-9, 16

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

‘Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.’

Have you ever been around someone so much that you just need some space? Maybe you argued as you got ready... or on the way to church... it’s been a while for me – probably only because I live alone – but one of the things I’ve noticed is that we tend to argue more, and more fiercely with those we’re closest to.

And I wonder if that’s what was happening just before Jesus sent the seventy off. Because isn’t that what happens? You and your loved ones or closest friends are in a heated conversation. And one of you says, “Just leave.” Maybe Jesus’ disciples were starting to act like they knew all they needed to know. Jesus knew otherwise, but being a good teacher, he also knew he couldn’t teach them any more until they were ready to learn.

So he said, “Go,” like parents have from time immemorial, like the Prodigal’s father would have when his son left. And like those parents, Jesus would have prayed for them until they returned. He trusted that God would be with them, not saving them from their folly but present and ready to guide them and comfort them when they were ready.

Today we talk about mission. Not “mission and vision,” that’s in a couple weeks. Not necessarily

mission as in Volunteers in Mission or mission trips, though it could be. And not ministry. While there's not really a black-and-white distinction between ministry and mission, the concepts of the two – and how we practice them – are different.

For followers of Christ Jesus, mission is really God's mission. We were drawn to be in relationship with God. As the church we are to be God's partners in God's mission by living as if God's realm is a present reality. We do this by following Jesus' example of healing, feeding, teaching and leading.

When you hear today's first lesson, do you hear it as a call for each of us? Or do you simply hear it as Jesus' using the prophet's words to announce his own ministry? It is both. Jesus uses Isaiah's words to declare that this is what he's about. But the gospel writer also includes it so that we'll be reminded that this is our task as well. That's why I put a slight adapted version on your bulletin cover this week; so that you can take it home and put it on your refrigerator and read it out loud whenever you get out a drink or something to eat. Would you read it with me now? This is mission.

Ministry, on the other hand, is the activities of the church that keep us going. Ministries serve an important purpose within the church - by providing for worship, administration, programming, faith formation, maintenance and such – but ministries are mostly for us, the people who are already here.

Ministries are important, so if you're on a committee or ministry team, or teaching a class, if you bring flowers, help with Wednesday Night Live, or sing in the choir – or thinking of being part of one of these ministries, I'll say again, ministries are important.

What I'd like you to think about is this: Where is the balance between our ministries and our mission? When churches believe that their ministries are all that they need to be doing, they're not living out God's call. They may grow as disciples, but it's imbalanced growth. Many churches lean toward ministry. A church that is exclusively mission focused may grow in discipleship, but again, it's an imbalanced growth. Since not many churches are exclusively mission-oriented, this generally isn't a problem.

The difference between the balance between mission and ministry reflects an internally versus an externally focused church. Where does First church focus fit in the continuum? How much of our energies and other resources are directed toward the people already here? How much is directed to people who will never come to worship or Sunday school?

Jesus preached and taught. People listened and learned. That's ministry. But Jesus also healed the sick, fed the hungry, and comforted the afflicted. In our second lesson, that's what he's sending the seventy out to do – and that's what he sends us to do – as well.

Too often we think to healing and comforting and feeding is best left to professionals, but God knows we can do this and God asks us to step up and believe in God's power to be able to do it.

I practice Reiki and I am convinced of the power of ordinary people to do extraordinary things. The Source of all life is eager for us to be more than we think we are.

Susan Hunt shared a story of a small church that started off with a ministry which accidentally – through God’s grace – became a mission. There were a couple of young single mothers in this church, and the United Methodist Women noticed that these young women needed help.

The UMW’s reasons may not have been completely unselfish, but they started a ministry in which the older women became “surrogate grandmothers.” These women cooked weekly meals, helped out with fun activities for the kids, and held a Sunday school type day each week that allowed the young moms to have a few hours away. Essentially, each young mother had a church “grandmother.” The grandmothers would also meet each week to pray for the families and once a month, all the kids, moms and grandmothers would get together for a meal and bible study.

Before long, another single mom who lived near the church but had never attended there or any other church heard what the church was doing. She was incorporated into this program. It didn’t take long for the ministry to grow and transform to include even more mothers from the neighborhood. I

The church came to realize that this was an opportunity for them to share the love and grace of God with people in their community. The UMW could have been exclusive, “I’m sorry, this is for church families,” but that’s not what UMW is about. (You can read an introductory blurb about United Methodist Women in the Announcements part of your bulletin.) And their willingness for this ministry to become a mission transformed the whole church. They pour themselves out to others for the sake of the God’s good news. Yes, this surrogate grandmothers mission did bring a few new families into the church but, more importantly, it extends the awareness that God’s love is for everyone. That is, it expands God’s kin-dom.

A few times this week, I read about or heard stories about people who are concerned about their safety. The privilege that comes with pale skin means many of us don’t have to think about this. Yet hatred is alive and well in our nation. Children are beaten because they look or act differently. Last month while Bishop Jung was visiting family in Korea, his older brother asked him, “Are you safe?” Racism, homophobia, oppressions or terrorisms of any kind are antitheses of God’s intention for all of us. In too many places, people are being buried in mass graves. Faithful Moslems have been living in Myanmar and Bangladesh for nearly a thousand years. Now their governments are “cleansing” them, because they can. Because those who have to power to speak against such acts are not using their voices and their power to see that it stops.

Children and young adults in our nation wonder what will happen now that DAKA will no longer be supported.

We’re each a small piece in God’s intention. Our roles are different, yet we each have parts to play. With different theologies and political understandings, we each come to the table with different understandings. This wonderful diversity means that we find many more ways to address problems. We have more potential solutions than if we were alike.

Because of you, we are more than we would be without you. Because of your willingness to be present, your leadership, your voice. Thank you for your struggle... your uncertainty... aching for a better way.

God doesn't expect us to solve the problems of the world. We can't. All God expects is that we do our part, both here within this faith community, and through the ways we extend God's caring to our larger communities – locally and in the world. We have some fine mission work happening through the Needs Closet and the Memory Café, still I believe could find other way to extend First church's reach without becoming too outwardly focused. It's something to think about.

In the meantime, if you came to church fuming or guilty, it's time to let yourself of the hook. If you have felt beaten down by this morning's earlier events or from last week... if you're uncertain about what's ahead or you're sure it won't be good, immerse yourself in the love God offers. Allow the wellspring of all life to flow in you and through you, so that you can arise from this hour, renewed and refreshed for all the week may bring and all that God needs you to be.

Amen.