

THE PURPOSE DRIVEN CHURCH

Luke 4: 14-21

In Luke's Gospel Jesus begins his public ministry in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus opens the scroll and reads from the prophet Isaiah, the 61st chapter: "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." And then he announces, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In other words, this is who I am and this is what I am about. This is what the Spirit of the Lord has summoned me to do. This is my calling and this is my purpose.

So Jesus announces his mission statement there to the people he loved. In their own midst they would see the in breaking of God's kingdom, God's new initiative for Israel. The poor would hear good news, captives would be released, the blind would see, and the oppressed would go free. This new and gracious act of God's favor would change lives and indeed change the world. The lost sheep of the house of Israel would have a new shepherd. Jesus came with good news coupled with miraculous interventions in the lives of hurting people. Finally he would give his life as a ransom for many. His whole being was about offering salvation and hope to a hurting people. That is what Jesus announced in Nazareth.

The church of Jesus Christ looks back to these inaugural words of Jesus to guide our life and mission. The body of Christ understands our calling and purpose to mirror what Jesus was all about. The same Spirit that empowered Jesus also empowers us to offer a hurting world good news and liberation to all who are oppressed. In our own halting way, we seek to announce and embody the Good News of Jesus to a needy world. What we see Christians and so many other people doing to help in Haiti-that in a dramatic way is what the church has been called to do. That is our purpose and our summons.

At our officer retreat at Menaul School this weekend, we reminded ourselves of who we are and what our purpose is. You will see printed in this order of service two statements that guide us. The first is from the Book of Order and it is called the Six Great Ends of the Church. As a denomination this is what we understand our purpose to be-the six great tasks we engage in daily to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the

world. Then there is our Mission and Vision Statements along with our goals. Remembering what Jesus said at Nazareth, this is what we say about who we are and what we are called to do. I really hope you will read these guiding purpose statements.

At the retreat we listened to what you the people of St. Andrew have been saying about your vision and hopes for our future. Almost one hundred of you the last several months have met here at church and in homes to give voice to your dreams for St. Andrew. The Holy Conversation team has gathered your input and responses, which was then presented to our officers Friday and Saturday. What a tremendous amount of thought went into your input and for that I am very grateful. The Holy Conversation team will present a final recommendation to the Session in the near future. I am quite excited about the direction your input will help us take.

There are so many ways to think about the purpose of the church. I would offer you three brief images that guide my own thinking and acting. The first image. I think almost all your suggestions fit in a diagram I have long used in thinking of the church. Think of a cross with four words in each quadrant. This diagram sees the church having four main functions or purposes: Worship, Study, Fellowship, and Service. I feel that all we do grows from our foundation in worship and then flows into study, fellowship, and service.

A second image. Our service is twofold. First, we rescue the perishing. Think of rescuing people whose car has slid off a windy, slick road into a ditch. Second, we fix the road so that in the future cars will not crash again. In other words, as my professor Henry Quinius at Austin Seminary reminded us, the church must engage in both evangelism-rescue the perishing-as well as social justice-fix the roads so people don't fall off the same cliff again and again. John the Baptist reminded us to make straight the highway of our God.

A third image. Remember the first question of the Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man?" That's the way it used to be phrased. Now we would ask, "What is the main purpose of human life?" Calvin gave us the answer long ago: "The main purpose of human life is to glorify God and enjoy God forever." In all that we do and say, we seek to bring glory to God alone, the source of our lives, the source of our hope. It is God who made us and redeemed us in Christ, and to God alone belongs all praise and adoration. In praise of God we find our spirits lifted and our joy restored. Here and here alone is our deepest satisfaction, the highest enjoyment for the human spirit. To reconnect with the one who gave us life and life eternal-that is our ultimate purpose, our highest joy.

So what is our purpose as a church, the body of Christ? We worship the living God, we fellowship in Christ, we study the words of life, we serve. We rescue the perishing; we make straight the crooked paths. We glorify God and enjoy God forever. This is who we are and this is what we are about. May the Spirit of Christ empower us to live out our mission and our purpose. May it be so.