

*Jesus' Mission Statement*

Lessons: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10, Luke 4:14-21

Luke 4:14-21

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“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 he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

We live in an age of “Mission Statements.” Churches, companies, schools, military units, families, individuals spend time writing down a mission statement. It’s a way to focus, to make clear, a purpose and priority – a standard against which we judge what we do in our decisions and actions. “How does this choice further the mission?”

A lot of time and effort gets spent writing mission statements – especially when a group does it together. It’s a way to “get everybody on board” – to create a consensus, to build a unity. But sometimes groups get it backward: Instead of getting the mission clean and clear and asking everyone to join in, we spend time writing a mission statement that will include any and everything that anyone in the group thinks is a good thing. Everyone is included, but there isn’t any unity, because there is no mission.

I was on the staff of a big church for a while. They hired some consultants to help them clarify their vision and define their mission. They paid for a weekend retreat for about 150 leaders to focus on what they thought the church should be doing in the next ten years.

Late the second evening after a long day, there were big sheets of paper with lots of writing taped all around the room. One of the elders raised his hand and

stood to say, “We are trying to do everything someone wants to do instead of trying to decide what we *should* be doing. Why don’t we just start with the mission in the Great Commission: “Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all the things I have commanded you,”

After some comments, one of the elders stood and said, “I agree, but I just don’t think the verse goes far enough. It’s just too limiting.” A month later, the Mission Statement draft committee published their report: They assembled all the big sheets on the wall into 13 statements of Mission with tasks and goals. The report was about 30 pages long.

Out of that experience, I have read a lot of Mission Statements of a lot of churches, and I have come to a conclusion: They all say pretty much the same thing. “We will be all things to all people at all times, and some things more than others from time to time, depending...”

A Mission Statement points in one direction, not all directions. A Mission Statement has to tell us what we will choose not to do because there are more important things we should do. A Mission Statement is a tool in the toolbox. It is a ruler to help us measure whether or not we are being faithful to *the* Mission.

One of the members of the church I served in Louisville worked for Kentucky Fried Chicken. They had come a long way since Col. Sanders, but they had lost their way. Global diversification and rapid growth had them “going off in all directions.” They hired a new CEO, who did nothing for a month but listen – a trip around the world to listen to managers and customers. Then he called a meeting, gathered all the team leaders and executives of every department and said, “I think we have forgotten why we come to work everyday, and we are doing so many different things that we are not doing much of anything right. From today on, we are going to do one thing. Everything we do is going to help us do one thing until all of us are doing the same thing. From this moment, I want everyone to work at one thing until we do one thing right. From now on, the mission is clear: *We do chicken right!* If you want to do something else, quit now. And if you don’t work at doing chicken right, you will be fired. Now let’s get to work.”

They were all so proud of the hometown boy become famous. They had heard about all the marvels and miracles he had done, and surely he would do some things for them, too. The talk was everywhere that he was the long-awaited Messiah, and he would bring back the strength and glory they had when people saw them as the chosen people of God.

I imagine the synagogue that day was packed, and people were standing outside trying to hear through the open doors and windows. They said their prayers and sang their psalms, and brought the scriptures out for the lesson. It was the pattern of worship as old as Ezra when they returned from Babylon. They didn't have preachers. They had the words of the Torah and Prophets, and "rabbi" teachers in the congregation would comment on the lesson of the day. Everyone joined in.

They asked Jesus, their hometown "rabbi", to read whatever he wanted, and he asked for the Isaiah scroll. Then he read his Mission statement:

"The Spirit is upon me, and anointed me...": God has given me a calling, a mission...

"to bring good news to the poor": to go to those in the greatest need, and work among them to give good news and real help to meet their real needs – to feed and cloth and shelter the least of these.

"to proclaim release to the captives": to set free those who are closed out of community, neglected by disease, imprisoned for evils or by disease, shunned as inferior or unclean.

"to recover sight to the blind": to be the eyes of the most helpless, to restore vision to those who cannot see, to shine a light for those who refuse to see – to heal, and to teach.

"to set free the oppressed": to lift up those others put down, to include the ones others keep out, to be hospitable to the stranger, to welcome the suffering and humble, to judge those who keep them oppressed by their neglect and abuse.

"to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus sees his ministry as a Jubilee year – to re-cover generosity, to re-balance compassion, to forgive debts as we have been forgiven, to re-distribute wealth for the sake of those in greatest need. Now is the time to show what the Lord favors, what God wants us to do."

Jesus' puts himself in unity with the prophets who call God's people to the work of compassion and justice and mercy. Jesus says his mission is to make the love of God the work he is to do.

By the end of his ministry, they had seen him living out the mission in the practices, habits, and patterns of his work for God. They saw how the mission worked, and how they should work at his mission. He gathered them in an upper room. They knew all the Messiah dreams were behind them, the opposing forces

had gathered their evil together, and Jesus was their enemy. In the middle of their fear for their security and their worry about the future, Jesus made the Mission Statement more focused, more clear, more simple. He said, “A new commandment I give you – that you love others as I love you.”

Brenham Presbyterian Church has the mission statement you see on the back of your bulletin. But there is also one – a different one – on the web sight that tells the community our mission. It is a really good Mission Statement: We strive to be followers of Jesus Christ and to grow in our faith and practice. The journey to deeper faith calls us to love God and our neighbor as we seek to lead lives of faithfulness, integrity, purpose and joy.

It’s a good re-statement of Jesus’ Mission Statement. We are called to love God and others *the way Jesus loved God and others*. We are called to lead lives of faithfulness, integrity, purpose and joy – not by our own measure of purpose and joy, but *integrity to Chris, faithfulness to his commands, letting his example be our purpose, and his presence be our joy*.

In a way, we could make our Mission Statement simpler – more focused, more clear. We could take a cue from KFC, and put Jesus’ new commandment is into one phrase, “At Brenham Presbyterian, we do following right.”

A Mission Statement is a standard. It says what we ought to do and asks us to test what we are doing against what we ought to be doing. It is the ruler we use to measure whether we are a church doing everything anyone wants, and some more than others – or whether we a church intentionally working to live and work as the body of Christ in our place and time.

So, the daily test questions for our following, and the test of faithfulness for Brenham Presbyterian comes in obvious questions to ask and hard to answer: *Do we love others the way Christ loves? Do we do the kinds of things Jesus does with the kinds of people Jesus serves? Do we do following right?*

Jesus was more focused on the Mission than the statement. He was focused clearly on the rule of God’s love in the world, and devoted to doing the things that showed others that God loved them. The followers didn’t wait to understand everything, or try to be perfect in their attempts. All they had to do was seek God’s way first and letting less important things be less important. All we have to do is love others the way he loves, follow him – and try to keep up. Let’s give him our faithfulness and integrity, until we can all say together with joy and in one, united voice, “At Brenham Presbyterian, we love others the way Christ loves us. We do following right.”