



Sermon **Future Church ... Our Commission!**

The year is 1963. Elizabeth Taylor and Audrey Hepburn are fashion icons. Martin Luther King, Jr. is *TIME* Magazine's man of the year. President John F. Kennedy is assassinated. Kodak introduces the Instamatic camera. Beatle mania begins in earnest with the release of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "I Saw Her Standing There." And Prince of Peace Lutheran Church is launched in Burnsville ... a town of about 8,000 people.

My, how the world has changed! How Burnsville has changed! But the question I want to address today is how we, as a church, must change in order to accomplish the unchanging mission God has given us.

Today's reading tells us how the early disciples respond to Jesus' death and resurrection. Their whole world has been turned upside down, and now they live in fear, cowering behind locked doors. But Jesus suddenly appears to them, speaks peace into their fears, blesses them with the Holy Spirit, and sends them out to be a blessing to the world. And they go. They go out into the world, sharing the good news of God's unconditional love and forgiveness.

And that's exactly what we're called to do. As Christians, our unchanging mission is to share the good news of God's unconditional love and forgiveness, with our actions and our words, in ways that impact the world around us.

In 1963, churches simply needed to do really good ministry within their walls, and people came to hear the good news. Churches grew. And churches like Prince of Peace that did extraordinary ministry grew extraordinarily big. But the world has changed dramatically. Burnsville has changed dramatically. Doing extraordinary ministry within our own walls is simply not enough. We need to get back to the original mission that Jesus gave us: to go out and be a blessing to the world, to make a difference.

I think that's what many young adults long for. They want to be part of something that's making an impact, changing the world. They are spiritual, but turned off by an institution that is inwardly-focused, more interested in arguing about who is in and who is outside of God's love than engaging in the world to make a difference. Perhaps you are, too. I know I am. If we are going to connect with a new generation, the way we accomplish God's mission must change. Here's a glimpse of what I believe God is calling us to do.

It all begins with Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's living proclamation of love, forgiveness, healing, grace and abundant life for all people. In Jesus, God is reconciling and redeeming all things ... not just some people, but all people. In Jesus, God says, "I know you fully, and I love you completely, and nothing will ever separate you from my love, not even death itself." In Jesus, God is making all things new. Jesus is ultimately the "why" for everything I'm going to talk about today.

It continues as each of us, and all of us together, dig more deeply into this book of faith, the Bible ... opening it regularly and letting it get into our lives. The living God speaks to us out of the written witness of God's people. When we gather together around the Bible, our souls are fed, our minds are renewed, and we are strengthened for ministry.

This fall we're going to do a preaching series entitled, "Making Sense of Scripture" that will start this October. Dr. David Lose from Luther Seminary, author of an excellent book entitled *Making Sense of Scripture*, will preach on the opening weekend of that series. In addition, we'll be launching new small groups and encouraging existing small groups to read Dr. Lose's book, discussing and learning together. It's going to be a great fall, and we're praying that many will feel equipped and encouraged to read the Bible in ways that bless their lives and equip them for ministry.

But the real traction happens when each of us, and all of us together, engage in God's mission: serving the needs of others, being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Now, please notice how this all comes together: we're called to serve the needs of others, to make a difference in this world. And the younger generations, generally turned off by the institutional church, are hungry to align with a community that is serving the needs of others, making a difference in this world. See the connection?

This brings us to our own Mission Outpost, one of the largest food shelves in Dakota County. We've seen a 32% increase in the number of people we're serving this year. We've served 1,034 families over 64,000 pounds of food since the beginning of the year!

Our new partnership with the Salvation Army, now on our campus, allows us to offer perishables like meat, milk and produce, providing greater nutrition to those in need. Our furniture ministry continues to expand, thanks to donations from the Holiday Inn. We are piloting an "English as a Second Language" class. We've learned from social workers that dental care is a great need in this community, so we are launching a dental ministry. We're exploring car care and medical care, as well.

Let me share just one recent "God story." Thanks to your generosity, we recently wrapped 213 Easter baskets to share with families in need. Twenty baskets and hams were given to Casa de Dios, 20 were given to Dakota County Public Health, 5 were given to the Salvation Army, and 16 were given to members of our congregation. That left 152 baskets for families visiting Mission Outpost the week before Easter. Want to guess how many families came through the Outpost that week? 152. And while we were certain we wouldn't have enough hams to go with all those baskets, they came out of the refrigerators like clowns out of a VW. Again, 152 of them.

As we look ahead, we see that the needs are only going to grow. According to Second Harvest, nearly 1 in 3 working families in America are low-income. 22% of working white families struggle to meet basic needs. Even one minority parent increases the family's chances of falling below the poverty line; 43% of working families with a minority parent are low-income. Those are staggering statistics, and we are called to respond.

But we need more room to serve. We have finalized plans to flip-flop the Mission Outpost with the current Teen Center, allowing both ministries to have more functional space. This will cost considerably less than completely renovating the current space. The cost for this expansion, which includes a lot of sweat equity, will be around \$100,000, and we will not begin until we have every penny.*

But God's hand is all over this project. This is the first time I'm publicly announcing it, and we already have generous gifts totaling \$55,000. We could use an additional \$24,000 from the capital repair fund for the necessary heat pumps, but we'd rather reserve those dollars for other projects. If God's mission excites you, this is a great place to invest.

While this expansion is badly needed, it's just one step. I believe that God is calling us to eventually do a far greater Mission Outpost expansion here on our campus, and invite others in the community to join us for the journey. We don't yet know if that long-term expansion will mean breaking down walls and expanding the current Mission Outpost into one of the lower parking lots, or if it means building something new between our current buildings, making mission the physical center of our life. What we do know is that seeds of faith will be planted as we work side by side in God's Kingdom.

Take a minute to dream with me about a typical morning in an expanded Mission Outpost. Dozens of disciples and volunteers are preparing for the day. Two women sort clothing. One is a long-time disciple at Prince of Peace. The other has never been a part of Christian community; she just likes to volunteer in meaningful ways. They work side by side, and they talk. As that young volunteer shares her struggles, the Prince of Peace disciple asks if she can pray for her ... and they pray, right there. For the first time in her life, that volunteer wonders if maybe there's something to this Christianity.

By noon the Outpost is buzzing. A single mom brings in her car with faulty brakes. It's no longer safe to drive, but she can't afford to fix it. Without it, she can't start the new job she needs to support her children. A volunteer hands her a voucher for a repair shop that partners with the Outpost. Her car will be fixed that day, at a price she can pay. Her eyes fill with tears of gratitude.

Dozens of people sit in a bright room with music playing in the background, filling out request forms for the food they need. Excited children run off to play in the supervised children's center while their parents request food and clothing for the family.

Two tables over, an older gentleman coughs frequently. One of our nurses discovers he's been ill for several weeks but can't afford a doctor. She schedules an appointment at our clinic, and within a week his cough is gone and his diabetes is better managed.

Later that afternoon students come in for tutoring. Volunteers from around the community read with younger children and work through math and science homework with older kids. They extend invitations to children's ministry events the following Wednesday, and, sure enough, several new kids attend W.o.W. for the first time.

By 5:00, a large room fills with the smell of good food. A couple hundred hungry people gather for a community meal. For many, it's the best, most nutritious meal of the week. Members of our spiritual care team mingle with the guests, asking to pray for them. It's surprising how many guests respond. They pray together, right there. In the kitchen, families work together to prepare the meal; a great opportunity for kids to learn the value of serving others.

After the meal, some guests attend classes: basic financial management, parenting, English as a Second Language, job connections. There's laughter as people leave for the evening, sharing hugs in gratitude for this community investing in the lives of others.

Does that sound like a dream? It is, and I believe that it's God's dream for us. We are moving toward that dream, and I have been absolutely amazed by the doors that God has opened along the way.

And here's another way God is calling us into service. Many teachers are concerned about the number of children coming to school without everything they need to thrive. While our schools are being called to higher standards, the economy is forcing them to do much more with much less. I believe God is calling us to step into that gap, so we're launching a partnership with Echo Park Elementary School. We're inviting every family living in that school's district to adopt it, to regularly pray for the children, their families, and the staff. We invite you to tutor, read to children, monitor the lunchroom, be another loving pair of hands in a classroom. With God's help, we have the power to positively impact that school and the lives of those children forever. In doing so, we'll meet and fall in love with the remarkable growing diversity in our community. If you've ever complained about "kids these days," here is your chance to make a difference.

I could go on, but there's no more time. I'll just say that I envision a vibrant future for this faith community, one that connects with our history and with the heartbeat of the community that we have

**We will not begin any phase of this project until we have the funding necessary to complete that phase. The project itself may begin without the entire amount of funding in hand. The intention is that we will not go into debt to do this project, but will only progress as we can pay for the work.*

been called to serve. I believe that these are God's dreams, and I trust that, just as God provided those first disciples with the Holy Spirit, God will provide all that we need now.

None of this, however, can happen without your passion and your participation. I can cast God's vision, but I cannot make it happen. Only you can do that. So I am asking you to respond in some very specific ways.

First, pray. Pray for our future, for those God is calling us to serve. Pray that God will reveal how you are called to be a vital, active part of the puzzle.

Second, worship. Make weekly worship a priority. Worship is the center of our life together. Here we celebrate what God has been up to all week in our lives. Here we pour ourselves out in praise, only to discover ourselves remarkably filled in spirit.

Third, connect. Nothing will help you grow in faith and friendship like a healthy small group. If you're not in a small group, join one. Check out the options on our website.

Fourth, serve. No matter how much or how little time you have, find a need and fill it. Connect your passions, gifts and experience with God's call. You will never be more like Jesus than when you're serving. If the extent of your connection here is dropping kids off and occasionally worshipping, you're missing out on the best part of being a disciple.

Finally, give. If you are a regular, generous giver, thank you. One year ago, our debt stood at \$4.45 million, and today our balance is \$3.174 million. That's over \$1.2 million paid on debt in just one year. That's amazing generosity.

But what stands in the way of our future is the reality that 48% of those who call Prince of Peace their church contribute less than \$10 per week on average. We cannot move fully into the future God has for us if that continues. If regular, generous giving is not yet a part of your discipleship, I want to challenge you to begin. Start small. Commit to \$5 or \$10 a week, and sign up for automatic giving. Your giving will make a difference in the lives of others, and in your life, too. And if you are one of the many people with real financial need please let us help. Our Mission Outpost, along with the Salvation Army are able to provide real help in time of need.

The world has changed since 1963, but God's mission hasn't. How we accomplish God's mission, however, must. God has given us a clear direction for our future. It's a future that will engage people of all ages in the kind of joyous, selfless living to which Jesus calls us. The cry of God's people can no longer be "Feed me more." It must become "Pour me out, Lord." It is my dream that in another 50 years some pastor will stand, perhaps right here, and talk about how Prince of Peace is a thriving ministry because we gave ourselves – heart, mind, soul and strength – to God's dream.