

## What's Your Why?

Baptism of the Lord Sunday, January 12, 2020

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Isaiah 42:1-9

Everyone has a mission statement these days! You see them plastered on walls in company lobbies and emblazoned inside promotional brochures. Mission statements define a business or organization's identity and purpose and can go a long way in helping the company cast vision for its future.

Microsoft's mission is to "empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more." Southwest Airlines: The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of customer service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride and company spirit. Google's mission is to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Tesla's mission is to "accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy." The American Red Cross's mission is to "prevent and alleviate human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors." Starbucks' mission is to "inspire and nurture the human spirit — one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time."

Many churches have mission statements as well. Celebration Church (Jacksonville, FL): "Leading people to experience a God-First Life." Southeast Christian Church (Louisville, KY): "Connecting people to Jesus and one another." Red Rock Church (Littleton, CO): "We exist to make Heaven more crowded." Federated Church (Fergus Falls, MN): "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Arms."

But mission statements aren't just for big companies and churches. There is a growing trend toward writing personal mission statements. Writing a personal mission statement allows us to identify our goals and find the motivation to accomplish them. What, exactly, is your mission in life? What drives you to get up in the morning? What legacy do you hope to leave this world? These are key questions we all should be asking.

Many influential people think personal mission statements are a good idea. Denise Morrison, CEO of Campbell Soup Company plans "to serve as a leader, live a balanced life and apply ethical principles to make a significant difference." Joel Manby (CEO, Herschend Family Entertainment) wants "to love God & love others." Oprah Winfrey (founder of the Oprah Winfrey Network), aspires to "be a teacher. And to be known for inspiring my

students to be more than they thought they could be." Sir Richard Branson (founder of the Virgin Group) intends "to have fun in [my] journey through life and learn from [my] mistakes."

A personal mission statement is a way of defining yourself and what you're about; defining your boundaries, clarifying what you're wired to do and unapologetically leaving out the rest. It sharpens your focus and guides your decision-making, acting like a compass for your life. In that way, it acts like a filter. You can instantly discern whether that job should be taken, that opportunity exploited or that decision made based on your defined purpose in life.

A personal mission statement is really a statement of *call*, defining what God put you on this earth to do. It answers the question: "What's your why?" God provides the church with a common mission, and it's up to us to discover our niche within that larger mission through the power and guidance of God's Holy Spirit. If you want to know how this works, you need look no further than to the personal mission statement of Jesus himself.

Jesus' personal mission statement began long before he was born. God used the prophets to outline the mission of the Messiah, whom Isaiah sees as the "servant" of Israel. God calls him "*my chosen in whom my soul delights*." This tells us right up front that this personal mission statement is the result of a calling. God's own spirit will be upon him, empowering him to fulfill the mission which is to "*bring justice to the nations*" (v. 1). The mission of the Servant is thus an echo of the covenant mission that God gave to Abraham, the one through whom all the families and nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12).

The justice that the Servant brings will not be through force but through long-suffering love. One of the primary traits of the servant will be gentleness; he will not display enough physical force to even break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning wick. He will be crushed, but not before he completes his mission to "*establish justice in the earth*" (v. 4). What does this justice look like? It is a call to be a "*light to the nations*" (v. 6). God's "justice" is always about setting things right, which means setting people right. It's a mission to open blind eyes, both physically and spiritually; to liberate those who are in the prison of darkness (v. 7). It is a mission to embody and live out the new creation, the "*new things [God] now declare(s)*" (v. 9).

Isaiah fleshes out this mission more specifically in chapter 61. Once again, it is God's spirit that empowers the mission of releasing captives, opening the eyes of the blind and

proclaiming the good news of God's new creation, the "new thing" God is up to. This is the personal mission statement that Jesus will live out in everything he says and does. He will spend time among the poor, proclaim the good news of God's kingdom (shorthand for the "new thing" God is doing), open blind eyes in more ways than one, and set people free from slavery to sin and death. When Jesus gave his first sermon in front of the hometown crowd (Luke 4:18-19), he quotes these verses from Isaiah 61 virtually verbatim. He adopts the personal mission statement of God's Servant for himself.

Jesus' first sermon in Matthew's gospel defines his mission even more concisely. *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"* (4:17). Jesus is empowered for this mission at his baptism, when the Holy Spirit descends on him (3:16) and God's voice declares, *"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased"* (v. 17). Jesus and his mission fulfilled God's mission, the fulfilling of *"all righteousness"* (v. 15).

Jesus goes directly from the waters of the Jordan into the wilderness, where he is tempted by Satan to abandon his personal mission statement and to take the easier path of self-indulgence (Matthew 4:1-11). But Jesus would not be deterred. Empowered by the Spirit and galvanized by the Scriptures, Jesus continued to use the mission as his guiding compass.

It's no coincidence, then, that after Jesus calls his first disciples, he immediately begins implementing that mission and teaching them how to do the same. He *"went through Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and sickness among the people"* (4:23).

Jesus did not spend a lot of time coming up with his own personal mission statement. Neither did his disciples. If we turn to the lectionary text for today (Acts 10), we find Peter crossing ethnic and religious boundaries to meet with Cornelius, a Gentile believer, proclaiming that this new relationship is the result of the mission Jesus gave to him and his fellow disciples. Peter acknowledges that the original mission is God's: *"You know the message [God] sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ — he is Lord of all"* (Acts 10:36). Jesus performed that mission, *"anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power,"* and *"went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him"* (10:38). The disciples witnessed this mission, and now the mission of God, the mission of Jesus, is theirs. *"[Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name"* (10:42-43).

Notice how the mission gets transferred. First, from God the Father to Jesus the Son through the Holy Spirit. Then, from Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, to the disciples. And finally, from the disciples, via the Holy Spirit, to us! As disciples of Jesus, this is our personal mission now. We have skills and abilities given by the Holy Spirit. Our personality reflects the person of Christ. Our values, dreams and passions are all focused on doing the work of the kingdom: healing, proclaiming, liberating and doing all the good you can.

There is a story told about 19<sup>th</sup>-century British scientist Thomas Huxley who got off a train one day at the Dublin station. He was late for an important meeting of a scholarly society. Jumping into the nearest cab, he ordered the coachman, "Drive fast!" With a crack of the whip, the horse was off and running, pulling the cab at a furious pace. Huxley called to the driver: "Do you know where you're going?" The coachman answered with a grin: "No, I don't know where we're going, but I'm driving very fast."

That's a pretty accurate picture of the way many of us live our days. We need a personal mission statement to remind us where we ought to be going. We have our general orders from God through Jesus and through the disciples, but each of us must discover our individual calling, our own personal mission within the mission of God. What's your why? I encourage you to find out, to discover your mission, to get some clarity of purpose, and then to live it out!

Prayer: Lord, I surrender my life to you. I want to do something, to make something happen, all on my own strength, but I know without you I can do nothing. I know my life is not my own, it is yours to work through me. Lord, I am grateful for this life you've given me. You've blessed me with different gifts and talents. Help me understand how to cultivate those things to bring glory to your great name. Amen.

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