

John Knox Presbyterian Church
 Indianapolis, IN
 14 August 2011
 Matthew 28:16-20

WHAT'S YOUR MISSION STATEMENT?

OPENING REMARKS

Good morning. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to worship with you this today. I bring you greetings from Linda Valentine, the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council, and Hunter Farrell, the Director of Presbyterian World Mission. Essentially, we are the "Sessional Committees" of the General Assembly. There always seems to be confusion: we're not the GA; instead, we do what the GA tells us.

Let me also add that we sincerely appreciate the leadership and support from your church. On Friday, you opened your doors to host a reception for Hunter Farrell, the Director of Presbyterian World Mission, and yesterday, you opened them again to host the Whitewater Valley Presbytery meeting. Thank you for all you do. We appreciate your ministry.

Finally, let me say that it's a pleasure to meet Lisa Crismore. Actually, I've known Lisa before I met her. You see, her daughter, Bethany, was a student at Hanover College when I worked there and I met her husband, Jim, when I preached at Faith PC here in Indy. So, Lisa, it's a pleasure to meet you finally.

INTRODUCTION

Today, as I prayed about what message God wanted me to bring to you, I spoke with Frank about what's going on at John Knox. After 30 minutes of conversation on the phone, I said, "I get it. I get it." Wow. You really have a lot of wonderful ministries going on in your church. Frank also told me about your new church logo and "tag line" – Open. Caring. Community. And so, I chose for my text today, Matthew's account of the Great Commission.

When I was installed in my first "solo" pastorate in a small, rural church in Natchez, MS, I received my own personal mission statement. Let me show you. (Show the congregation a framed needlepoint inscription.)

Let me read to you what it says on the back. "Chris, it took me almost six weeks to get his charge ready for you today; but it will take me less than two minutes to offer it to you. I've done it in needlepoint, hoping that you will hang it in your office for ready and frequent reference. It says: READ. STUDY. THINK. PRAY. SERVE. PREACH THE WORD. LOVE GOD'S PEOPLE."

These were my marching orders, my charge, my mission statement, as I served as pastor of Westminster PC in Natchez, MS.

By the grace of God, it was given to me by the late Rev. Bill Mansell, Frank's grandfather. I've kept it on the wall ever since as a reminder.

So, let me ask YOU this morning, "What's YOUR mission statement?"

I think that one of the most important things a congregation can do is formulate a mission statement. On one hand, we have too many of our congregations trying to do too many things all at once, and they neglect the essential, most important things. On the other hand, others have moved into "survival mode" and

are simply trying to maintain what they have. They've chosen to sit "dead in the water," just to keep afloat, not really going anywhere. Maybe, the problem is that they don't know where they are going. They have no goal, no direction. A mission statement that defines the purpose of their life together would help them, greatly.

Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, once said, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there."

TEXT

In our scripture reading this morning, we are at the end of Matthew's gospel. According to the gospels, after Jesus had risen from the dead, he appeared to the apostles for 40 days. As the risen Christ prepares to leave his followers, he gives them, the church, you and me our mission statement.

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore," Jesus said, "and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember," he added, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

CONTEXT

When I was a pastor, it seemed that I always led a Bible Study class, and invariably someone would say to me, "You know, Preacha', if I could have only seen one of Jesus' miracles – the feeding of the 5000; healing the lepers, the lame and the blind; walking on water; or the raising of Lazarus – then I'd have more faith – then I'd truly believe."

And yet, here's Jesus with the 11 who have been with him since the beginning of his ministry. They were there when Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. They saw Jesus crucified, dead and buried, and they witnessed the resurrection in all its glory.

However, in today's reading, Matthew said, "When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted" (v. 17). Some doubted.

And in the midst of their doubt then and our today, Jesus gives us our mission in straightforward, concise statement. Jesus mission – the mission of his first followers, the mission of all of his followers and our mission today – is not to set up God's kingdom. It is not in achieving success, as the world of business might judge us. It is not the same thing as building up membership. It is not a numbers game of who has how many, but it is taking time to enter into relationship with others that is deeper than a superficial friendship. It is daring to share with others the life-giving, life-liberating, death-defying relationship of God in Jesus Christ. It is inviting others into this relationship.

Our mission, friends, is stated clearly and directly: "Go, make disciples, baptize, teach and remember."

EXPOSITION

You see, Jesus commissions us to move beyond where we are. He says to us: In the midst of your doubts, don't get stuck in where you've been. Don't get stuck in where you think you are, but dare to move out!

Too often, the church of Jesus Christ has been willing to settle for the status quo. We've gotten stuck in where we've been or we think that what God is doing in our midst today is all that God will ever do. But Jesus comes to us and says, "Go!" Move out from where you are. "Go, make disciples, baptize, teach and remember."

A mission statement tells us who we are and what we are supposed to be doing. It helps us answer important questions like: Why are we here? What vision do we share?

For about 18 months, Presbyterian World Mission engaged in a Strategic Mission Planning process. Key leaders gathered together to examine what we're trying to accomplish as we answer Christ's Great Commission to: "Go, make disciples, baptize, teach and remember."

To guide our work, they created a vision statement; much like your leaders did here at John Knox. The vision for Presbyterian World Mission is for "God's people (us) [to be] connected in effective mission: [as they (we) have] a compelling witness to Jesus Christ in a globalized world."

You see, theologically, we, Presbyterians, speak of mission in the singular ("mission" versus "missions") because we believe that all mission is God's mission. Whether it is global or local, or as Hunter Farrell says, "glocal," it's all God mission.

And we, Presbyterians, also believe that we do mission in partnership. We partner with Jesus Christ, we partner with each other, and we partner with the world at large, to fulfill the Great Commission. At the end of the Jesus' mission statement, he asks us to remember that he will be with us always – even to the end of the age. It's all about partnership.

Several years ago, Presbyterian World Mission adopted the term "co-worker" instead of "missionary" to remind us that mission is not something that we do *to* others, but rather, to emphasize our theological understanding that we do mission in partnership *with* God, *with* each other and *with* others.

So in keeping that in mind, instead of calling Jesus' mission statement "The Great Commission," maybe, we should call it, "The Great CO-mission."

RELEVANCE

So, let me ask YOU again this morning, "What's YOUR mission statement?"

Now, some of you may be thinking, "I'm not a pastor. I'm not even an elder or a deacon. Why should I have a mission statement?"

Well, guess what? As a follower of Jesus Christ, you are a minister, and you have been commissioned by him.

Let me tell you about a man named "Bob." His church has been supporting our mission co-workers in Honduras, Mark and Ashley Wright, for a couple of years, and they wanted to take a short term mission trip to visit the Wrights and do some work with the street kids in Honduras. Bob's wife and teenage children wanted to go; however, he was reluctant, but he went anyway.

As he wandered slightly away from the group, Bob noticed that he was being shadowed by a little boy about 7 or 8 years old. This little guy just kind of attached himself to Bob, and however Bob was standing, little guy would do likewise. If Bob crossed his arms, the little boy would too. If Bob put his hands on his hips, he did as well.

Eventually, these two strangers got into a conversation. Now, Bob only knows two phrases in Spanish, and so he used one of them, "¿Como se llama,

usted?" And the little boy answered, "Christian." And then Christian started talking a mile a minute. And then Bob said, "No comprendo." That was his only other phrase that he knew, "No comprendo."

But Christian wouldn't stop talking, and he put his arm around Bob's waist, and hugged him. "Mi amigo." My friend. After a while, Christian asked Bob another question. By this time, Bob was tired of saying, "No comprendo," so finally he just said, "Si." And the little boy got a huge smile on his face, and went racing off to the little hut where he lived. As Christian took off, it occurred to Bob that he had no idea what he had just agreed to. Maybe he had promised to take the boy's family to America or give his daughter to him in marriage, but whatever it was, clearly, it was a big deal to Christian.

A little while later, the boy ran back carrying a carton of chocolate milk on his hands, and he handed it to Bob. Bob pointed to his chest. "For me?" "Si! Para ti." Big smile.

And then Bob realized what made this little boy so excited was not at all what Bob thought it would be. It was not what Christian was going to get; it was that even he, Christian, could give. At that moment, Bob realized that there was another shadow among them – the shadow of the Risen Christ in their midst. That one experience, that simple little act of generosity from one who had very little, changed Bob's life in big way, and when he came back to states he wasn't the same.

A few weeks later, along with the others who went on the mission trip, Bob stood in front of the congregation to talk about his experience. When it was his turn to speak, Bob said, "I went there thinking of what I was going to do for others, but I'm here to tell you about what they did for me. It changed my life." And he told story of his new friend, Christian – of all the things they did together. At the end of his presentation with tears in his eyes, Bob asked, "If we can do that there, why can't we do that here?" And from that day on, there was no bigger advocate in the church for "glocal" mission than Bob. Little by little, the church was transformed into an authentic community of mission practice.

PERSONAL RELEVANCE

When is the church — the church? Jesus says that it's when we engage in mission! It changes your life!

So, what about you today? When you made your profession of faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you were also commissioned by him.

You see, the question for us today is not *will* you engage in mission, but rather, *when*?