

“WHERE ARE WE? WHERE ARE WE GOING”

Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 28:16-20

preached on January 4, 2009

We've just heard two passages that I think about a lot. They are both from God, one from the Father and the other from the Son, but they give us two different sets of instructions. I believe the call of Abram is a call to every Christian. *“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’”* (Genesis 12:1) Leave behind what you know, and go to where I want you to be. Step out in faith. Centuries later Jesus expanded on that call for every Christian by saying, *“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”* (Luke 9:62) And again, *“Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; whoever loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”* (Matthew 10:37) That says that we cannot allow anything to hold us back from stepping out in faith at the call and direction of God. We are to be willing to leave everything behind to move toward where God wants us to, even if we don't know where that is when we start out. That's tough, but that's God.

The words of Jesus are a bit different. Like the Father, He doesn't tell us where to go, just what we are to do when we step out in faith. *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19-20) Now I find that very interesting because it says that it doesn't matter where we go. God will be with us. Jesus will be by our side. In fact, as I understand it, wherever we happen to be is where God wants us to be, as long as we are making disciples, baptizing them, immersing them in the presence of God, and teaching them what it means when we make Jesus the Lord of our life. There are no instructions on where to go or how to get it done, just that we need to get it done.

Now that might be an easy commandment to follow if we had the mind, heart, wisdom, grace, commitment, and faith of Jesus. I don't know about you, but I'm not there yet. Part of my ordination vows is the expectation to move on to perfection in this life, but there is a whole lot of moving toward perfection that still needs to be done. And that's not surprising because we are all humans here. We are fallible. Spirits may be willing, but the flesh is often weak. If we were on the same level as the Apostle Paul, or the disciples after the resurrection, we might be able to live by this commandment. But with some exceptions, we are not where we could be. We need direction. We need God's vision before us.

Dale Galloway wrote, *“Tell me your vision and I can predict your future. Tell me your dreams and I can tell you what your values are. Tell me your aspirations, and I can predict the quality of your life. All this means that nothing happens in a church until someone seeks God's direction for*

“**WHERE ARE WE? WHERE ARE WE GOING**” Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 28:16-20 preached on January 4, 2009 *a particular congregation.*” The proverb lists it quite clearly. In the King James Version it reads, “*If there is no vision, the people perish.*” (Proverbs 29:18) If we don’t know where we are going or what we are trying to do, the time will come when we no longer exist. And I have looked at a number of congregations that are slowly dying because they have forgotten the vision and passion that gave them life. That fate cannot be ours.

In past this congregation has done some very good work determining our purpose; looking at the values at the core of our life and faith. Once a month, as we did this morning, we will remember our mission statement and our core values by putting them in front of us in a very obvious way. My desire is that the mission statement and core values become a part of each and every one of us. So that all of us will know without a doubt what we called to do, and to know what is expected of membership, of being a part of the body of Christ. In Luke 14, Jesus tells us point blank that we need to know the cost of being a disciple. “*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*” (Luke 14:27) And the cross of which He speaks is the mission of bringing salvation, of bringing life to all who will receive it. When we do that, we will be a congregation where people are continually growing in faith; where others are stepping up and stepping out to serve in the name of Jesus, whether within the church or beyond; where all are learning their PLACE for mission and ministry based on how God has shaped their heart and their life. It is a vision of a congregation growing in faith and building the kingdom of God in this place. And a glorious vision it is. OK. But how do we get there? How do we do that?

Our goal, our mission, our purpose is to make disciples by sharing Christ’s love through worship, ministry, mission and fellowship. We are to help people move from being visitors, to regular attenders, to members, to ministers in service to Christ. We are here to help people take the next step toward Jesus. And it doesn’t where any of us are in our journey in faith at this point in time. We all have another step to take to move closer to our Lord. And it is not a matter of putting the right program in place. It is a matter of helping people move closer to God. For faith is journey. It is a walk with God. As Paul writes, “*Now in Christ, you, who once were far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*” (Ephesians 2:13) By accepting the blood of Christ to wipe away our transgressions and sins, we have started on a journey that leads to the very side of God.

Again, how do we do that? Well, in order for me to keep this body healthy, it is necessary for me to take some maintenance medication. And to keep the body of Christ healthy, we need to look at our MEDS as well - Multiply - Expect - Deepen - Simplify. These are the MEDS.:

M - Multiply. Some might call it evangelism, but it is maintaining an attitude that is focused outside the church. It is establishing a mind set that we hold the greatest message ever delivered. We have the gifts of hope and life to offer to a dark and dying world. We need to find ways to share that message and allow God’s kingdom to grow.

E - Expect. The expectation that members be active and involved in serving the church,

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and serving the body of Christ. Periodically I am asked if a person can be a good Christian without being a part of a local church. I immediately tell them, “No.” We need to be an active part of the body of Christ, both inside the congregation and beyond the congregation. An expectation of activity.

D - Deepen. That means that we have to deepen our faith, that we need to grow closer to God. We do that through Bible Studies and prayer groups. We do it through Sunday School, work camps, and mission trips. We do it through the clothing bank and anghel Food. And in the years before us we will need to increase the opportunities our people have to grow in faith.

S - Simplify. Keep the main thing, the main thing. And the main thing is to make disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world. It also means that we develop and maintain clear steps, a clear structure and process for making disciples. It is about helping people move from visitors to attenders to members to servants. We make the process clear and simple.

That is the medicine we need to put in place so we can increase our PEERS. Our peers are those like us, with the same standing before God. Our peers are those who are taking this journey in life and faith with us. But the PEERS I am talking about mean something a little more. It stands for Priorities - Excellence - Engage - Relevant

P - Priorities are Right - people who are Christ centered, living in the midst of a Christ centered church - that's what is expected of our members and ourselves

E - Excellence - People who seek excellence, who offer excellence first of all in worship, but also in all that we do - we always offer our best in everything we bring forth

E - Engage - People who are involved in worship, mission, ministry, and service; engaged in acts of faith, and

R - Relevant - People knowing that Christianity is not a religion as much as it is a way of life. Our faith is very relevant to our life and lifestyle for it helps define who we are and what we do. And in the process, we show our faith in word in deed that others might find Jesus in their life. These are the PEERS we need to find and develop. The PEERS that we need to bring into this congregation, and into the body of Christ.

Now that's a lot of material to absorb on a Sunday morning. So let's look at it one more time. The mission of St. Paul Church is to make disciples by sharing the love of Christ through worship, ministry, mission, and fellowship. We will provide the MEDS that will increase our PEERS. Non of this is easy. And it won't happen overnight. John Maxwell says that leadership development is not a microwave recipe, but one for the crock pot. In the same way, this beginning look at where we are going is a crock pot recipe that will take some time to cook. It will require insight,

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creativity, and commitment. There will be continued education leading toward where we need to be, and we will all be asked to covenant with one another before God, so that we, like the first century church, might go forth to turn the whole world upside down; that we might grow in Spirit and in number daily.

Every week we pray, *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:10) If we take that prayer seriously, we have to seek God’s will for ourselves and for this congregation. If we believe what we are praying, we must be ready to step out in faith to follow that vision, even if it makes us uncomfortable, even if we do not fully understand where we are going. But we are called to take the next step in faith. We are called to make a commitment to God, for each of us is called to be a living sacrifice to the honor and glory of God; our life being poured out in love and service so that the perfect love that is Jesus Christ can fill us, can overflow us, that all the world around us might be transformed for the purposes of God. The prayerful hymn asks, *“Breathe on me, breath of God till I am wholly thine, til all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.”* As the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have only two possibilities. Either we have succeeded in our quest for perfection, or we must continue to seek and follow God’s vision for ourselves and for this congregation, and then move forward to make that vision a reality.

Where will this vision lead? In a way, I have no idea. And yet I know that if we go forth in faith we will make disciples for the transformation of the world by sharing the love of Christ through worship, mission, ministry, and service. I know that we will glow with the fire, with the love of God filling our hearts, minds, and souls. I know that we will continue to go out, to places near and far to minister and serve in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that we will be part, no, we will be partners in building the kingdom of God in this place. And all the world will be better because of our commitment to one another, and our covenant and connection to the Lord.

Christianity is not a matter of membership, but a walk in faith at the side of Jesus Christ, our Lord; seeing the world with His compassion and reaching out with His grace. We can either work toward God’s purpose and vision for us, or we can fall away from His grace. The choice is ours. So I challenge you to look within your heart, to look beyond your comfort level and see what God is doing, where God is calling you to be involved in the mission and ministry of this part of the body of Christ. What is the next step you need to take in your journey in life and faith? Where do you need to grow, and to whom do you need to reach out? For this is just the beginning. Let us be the children of God boldly going forth in faith to make a difference in the world, to make a difference in our community, a difference in our home, in our lives. Let us be the body of Christ for this world, that we might bring God’s vision to life in this place. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.