

Scripture:

Isaiah 61:1-3

Matthew 25:31-46

John 21:15-17

“He is here and we need to be there.”

A few years back a Presbyterian pastor I know well was asked ----- “What is your vision for your congregation?”

“What is your vision for the congregation?”

And he answered it this way saying ---- “As far as I’m concerned as long as we are engaged together in worship ---- reading scripture --- praying ---- pastoral care --- and mission ----- that’s our vision.”

“As long as we are engaged together in worship ---- reading scripture --- praying ---- pastoral care --- and mission ----- that’s our vision.”

I can’t help but think that there’s something to this.

When we worship together ---- read and study the Bible together ----- pray together ----- offer pastoral care and share in fellowship together ----- and engage in faithful mission together ----- we have a vision --- indeed this can be our vision ----- to do these 5 things faithfully together.

So --- St. Andrew’s in Whitby.

Worship ----- check ----- vibrant worship even ----- liturgical dance ----- praise team ---- little harmonies --- vibrant --- exploring ---- sharing ---- and growing gifts in worship.

Read and study the Bible together ----- check ----- double check for today even --- as we have held up the centrality of God’s Word by dedicating a new Bible ---- emphasizing the importance of reading and studying scripture.

Pray together --- check ---- opening and closing of each meeting in the church ---- monthly prayer time --- 5 prayers in our service of worship today ---- personal prayers --- and so on ---- prayer --- check.

Fellowship and pastoral care ----- check ----- lunch and a hike after our worship today ----- and of course much more ---- check.

Mission ----- check ---- and also pause.

Check and also pause for mission.

Pause not because it's questionable --- pause not because maybe we're not doing enough in mission.

Pause ----- because I think we need to talk a bit more about one aspect of it ----- our local mission.

And pause because we need to celebrate it a bit more than we already do.

In our Old Testament reading today ----- Isaiah 61verse 1.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted,
to proclaim freedom to the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners.”

And then from our first gospel reading today ----- Matthew 25 verse 35 and 36.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

And then from our second gospel reading today ---- John 21 excerpts from all 3 verses.

“Jesus said “Feed my lambs.””

“Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.””

“Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.””

A blended paraphrase of our 3 scripture passages might look something like this.

“The Spirit of God is on us and He has set us aside to be the ones to share good news with the poor, and bind up the brokenhearted.

The Spirit of God has revealed to us that we are to be the ones who give something to eat to some of the hungry people in our community ---- and to welcome in the stranger ---- looking after them and helping them out a bit.”

And then finally ----- “Jesus has said to us ---- folks ----- feed my sheep --- feed my people ---- give them food to eat and show them my gospel.”

Caring for people --- feeding them --- clothing them --- loving them --- welcoming them ----- treating them with respect and dignity --- the respect and dignity that they deserve as beings created in the very image of God --- is absolutely central to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The words of Jesus Christ ----- from Matthew’s gospel reading today -----
 “Truly I tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

And

“Truly I tell you whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

How we treat others ----- is how we treat Jesus Christ.

Our local mission work and witness is not about us ---- it’s not even really about those we help --- it’s all about Jesus Christ.

Our bi-weekly community outreach and food bank program ----- the very heart of the gospel --- is all about Jesus Christ.

It’s not just some human initiative or secular program --- it is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ come alive in our midst.

And it is something we do well --- very well.

Well done us ----- well done good and faithful servants at St. Andrew’s in Whitby ---- it’s anniversary Sunday the perfect opportunity to celebrate us a little bit --- thanks to God directing us.

I want to ask us all a question now ---- just to lift up the gospel nature --- the Christ driven --- God directed ----- Spirit sustained ministry that is our community outreach faithful.

And it's a very simple the question.

When you think of our community outreach and our food bank ----- our monthly reverse offering --- and all the food and cleaning and hygiene products you lug into the church so that we can give them away freely to those in need.

When you think of these things ----- who do you think of --- what person pops into your head --- who comes to mind?

Who comes to mind when you think about our community outreach?

Think about it a minute.

I hope that the answer that came to your mind is --- Jesus Christ.

Because in truth Jesus Christ is the reason for it.

Not Emily ----- not me --- not the mission committee --- not the elders ----- not even our friends that come in and receive the food and the love and the grace and generosity of Jesus Christ ----- but Jesus Christ Himself.

“Truly I tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

I understand that some of us may not be as big or enthusiastic or able supporters of our local mission as others.

Maybe right now in your life stage you can't afford to support it financially - ---- that's O.K. ---- you can support it in prayer ----- or maybe you can support it by volunteering to help out with the program --- call the church office leave your name and someone from the mission committee will get back to you.

Maybe you don't have time ---- that's O.K. too ----- you can support it in prayer and or financially.

Maybe you can't support it because you don't agree with it ----- hmmm -
 --- that's a bit trickier isn't it.

Why might some of us feel this way.

It's new ---- and change can be difficult --- O.K. ---- we can work with this -
 ----- Jesus can work with this kind of reasoning as a stumbling block.

But as some of us have worked on adjusting to change this past year since
 God first started this ministry through us ---- consider this.

Jesus clearly --- and passionately ----- encourages ----- invites --- urges us
 even to do so.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
 because the Lord has anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted,
 to proclaim freedom to the captives
 and release from darkness for the prisoners.”

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you
 gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed
 clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in
 prison and you came to visit me.”

“Jesus said “Feed my lambs.””
 “Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.””
 “Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.””

I understand that it can be a struggle for some to be a part of something new --
 ---- but please consider what God is doing here through us and our
 community outreach carefully and prayerfully ----- because it truly is Christ
 centered --- and Christ driven ----- and it's something truly amazing to be a
 part of.

If you're totally on board with this ----- today is a great opportunity to
 celebrate and give thanks for this wonderful ministry and Christian witness -
 --- as one person said to me about our community outreach program---

“Jonathan ---- it’s the most exciting thing we’ve ever done since I’ve been a part of this church.”

On the other hand if you’re struggling to get excited about our community outreach program --- pray about it --- think about it --- talk with me about it --- talk with the elders about it --- talk with God about it ---- take the time to consider ---- is this really what God is calling us to do and be in this place at this time.

I’m convinced it is.

“It has kind of fallen into our lap.” --- as one person said to me.

Beginning in Sept. 2013 ---- it has fallen into our lap ----- people in need starting showing up.

And God continues to send the message that yes ----- St. Andrew’s in Whitby ---- I God --- not a member of your church --- not your elders --- not a committee of your church --- but I ---- the living and true God --- am calling you to do and be this --- here --- now.

He ----- God ----- is here ----- and here.

And He is calling us to be there ----- outside the sanctuary --- outside these walls.

To be there for people as needs arise.

We are doing a great work --- a great Christian witness and ministry here --- and we cannot come down --- we cannot stop ---- or be sidetracked.

Maybe we don’t all see it yet -----maybe some of us think that some of our friends who come and share in fellowship with us --- as we provide some of the basic necessities of life might be taking advantage of us ----- consider this.

What do you think the value on the underground market is --- for a roll of toilet paper ----- a can of tuna ---- or a bag of pasta.

What do you think the re-sale --- or underground market value is for the things we collect and distribute --- cereal --- peanut butter ----- granola bars - --- deodorant ---- shampoo ---- Lysol cleaner etc.

What do you think you could get for some of these items if you tried to sell them to someone else after getting them for free ----- the answer --- not very much at all?

People come to get them because they need them --- not so they can turn around and sell them.

O.K. ----- but ----- “You know some of our friends come and have cell phones.”

“Some of our friends come with cell phones.”

Have you ever tried to get a job without also having a phone number that you can be reached at?

Have you ever applied for a job and said ---- “Should you offer this job to me please drop the offer in the mail ----- or send me an e-mail because I don’t have a phone I can be reached at.”

Many people only have cell phones now.

Consider this --- you have children in school ----- but no phone for the school to call in the event of an emergency.

“Please teacher McLean or principal Johnston ----- if my son or daughter is sick at school just e-mail me --- or drop a note in the mail and as soon as I get it I’ll be in to pick them up.”

Jesus didn’t say feed people --- help people ----- proclaim good news to the poor ----- bind up the broken hearted ----- come visit me --- or invite me in - ---- but only under these circumstances ----- no cell phone ----- no whatever ----- only under certain conditions --- please make sure to check off boxes 1 through 5 before you consider helping anyone or feeding them.

Mission ----- check --- but --- also pause.

Pause and reflect ---- and pause and celebrate.

Anniversary Sunday is the perfect opportunity to pause ---- to pause and reflect --- and to pause and celebrate.

Reflect on just who God is calling us to do and be ----- and then celebrate that God is indeed employing us for His purposes --- His will --- and not just our own.

Helping others in Christ's name isn't about benefiting.

We engage in Christ's mission and live out the gospel --- not for any kind of benefit --- but because it is the Christ inspired thing to do and be.

But --- having said this --- I'm not sure who benefits the most --- our friends in need --- or us.

I started off talking about 5 things a pastor once said were the only things necessary for a church to have a vision.

Worship

Reading and studying scripture.

Prayer.

Pastoral care and fellowship.

And mission.

These 5 things aren't separate ---- they aren't stand on their own things --- and they aren't just boxes we check off.

All of these things are inseparably linked together like a tapestry.

Weave them together and you've got something faithful and life altering.

Together ----- worship --- studying the Bible --- praying ----- caring for one another --- and mission ----- amount to something huge --- their effect --- their influence becomes exponential --- immeasurable.

Isolated ----- separated they are far far less.

On anniversary when we Sunday we look back at the past ---- and to the future ---- we do well to remember ----- He is here ----- God is here --- among and within us ----- and we need to be there ---- and He wants us to be there for people in their times of need.

God is here --- within us --- and within us.

And we need to be there ---- we need to be there for people in need.

“Truly I tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
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“Jesus said “Feed my lambs.””
“Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.””
“Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.””

Consider these words --- God’s words ---- in light of what we are engaged in on His behalf here at St. Andrew’s --- our community outreach and drop in.

It may not be the only thing we are called to do and be for sure.

But ---- at this time --- in this place --- at this precise moment --- in the 181st and 182nd years of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Whitby ----- our mission just might be most clearly defined --- most faithfully lived out --- week in and week out through our community outreach program.

Only God knows --- and ever since it's inception in Sept. of 2013 --- the message has only gotten stronger and clearer and more powerfully expressed ----- "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in"

"Truly I tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

181 years later ----- He ----God ---- is still here ---- calling and directing and guiding us in new gospel directions.

And right now ---- at this stage in the life of this congregation of Christ ----- the message just keeps getting clearer ----- the words of Christ to Peter ----- "Feed my lambs." ----- "Take care of my sheep." ----- "Feed them."

He is here ----- and we are called to be there for those in need.

Feeding them ---- taking care of them ---- as if they were Christ Himself.

181 years later God still has a vibrant witness and ministry for this congregation.

What a great reason to celebrate.

We haven't dried up and withered away.

We're still listening to God's direction ----- we're still acting out Christ and helping those in need in our midst.

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in."

"Truly I tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

181 years and still walking in the light of the Lord.

Well done good and faithful servants.

Keep going good and faithful servants.

Amen.