

July 14, 2019

"Where is my mission?"

Luke 10: 25-37

Pastor Jonathan

A mission is meant to focus your life. At the hospital, the mission statement is supposed to tell you the main purpose of the hospital, likely to be for the care and recovery of the patients. In the military, it is there to win the war or the conflict, or simply to keep the peace. A mission can be a specific task that someone or some team is sent to do. Some of you have been on mission trips, of different kinds, at the hospital, in the military and the church also has a mission. This church mission is based on Jesus' mission. In fact we have a mission statement here. Could you tell me it now?

Jesus sent the 72 on a mission, in couples. He sent them ahead of his own ministry in various towns and cities. They were His advance force. Then He would come. Last week, we learned of their success, and Jesus Himself spoke of what we might call their failures, that is, where they were not received and therefore Jesus was not received. You can re-read the first part of chapter 10 of Dr. Luke's gospel.

What was Jesus' mission? It was to simply bring people into relationship with Him. The Kingdom of God is found in the person of Jesus Christ. Turning away from our sins, and turning toward Jesus as Lord and Saviour, as Master and Teacher, as Director and Manager of our lives is the mission, the core of Christianity. From this key relationship comes all the other good things: love and care and justice and education and compassion and mercy and grace...so let's not get things turned around, thinking it is our good works, our acts of compassion, our justice, that comes first, rather it is relationship with Jesus. You know this. I simply remind you. Although God can use anyone anytime for any purpose, there is no mission without the relationship to Jesus.

Dr. Luke follows the mission story with another person approaching Jesus to challenge Him or "test" Him. The NIV (1984) identifies him as an "expert in the Law." Other translations note simply that he was a lawyer. The beauty of his question is that he is asking about "eternal life." But what is that?

You could say, "Life that lasts into eternity." That wouldn't be wrong. It is a life that is seemingly hidden. Because we do not know we are spiritually dead, in the same way that we know we are physically alive. So we hear a Bible verse such as "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12) and it seems so

exclusive. And yet there it is. We are invited into this life; and we invite others into this life. This is our mission.

Yes, it begins with understanding that we are dead without Jesus. We need a second life, a second birth (John 3:7) that is eternal, starting now, and going on forever. Acknowledging our need of such a life is always the first step into the new life.

The expert in the law asks Jesus about where we might find such a life, in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is a good question. It is a mission-focused question. And Dr. Luke records, unlike Matthew (19:16-22) and Mark (10:17-22), that Jesus pushes the question back onto the questioner. "How do you read the Scripture?" Jesus asks. And the questioner correctly quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, just as Jesus does in Matthew and Mark.

The mission is about loving God with everything you are: your passion and core of who you are, your life energy, (soul), your intellectual ability, your analytical ability, your relational skills, your physical abilities (strength) and your personality, identity, and reason for living (mind), all that you are. And secondly, loving others who come into your life as well as you can. In fact, that second verse from Leviticus 19 is the more obscure one, which begins with not seeking revenge or bearing a grudge against someone in your life.

Now is the time, if you can identify anyone here, whom you hold a grudge against or who you believe has wronged you or the church or is somehow worthy of your scorn, now is the time to forgive them, to let them go, into God's hands. Is there someone here like that for you? Or somewhere in your life? Get that person into God's hands. That will be the first step in loving them. Even if that person is dead, or not here, or living somewhere else on the planet; make sure you release that person into God's hands by forgiving them, not excusing what they did, but not seeking your revenge on them, but releasing them to God. Any name that comes to your mind, release them to the Lord. Take time today to do this.

The Lord Jesus Christ commends the lawyer, and tells him that if does this, that is, loving God and loving his neighbor, he will live, he will experience eternal life. But the lawyer is likely bombarded with guilt and shame, as most of us are, in thinking about how he has treated other people, let alone how he has treated God. So he asks a follow up question to his question about eternal life to "justify himself," to assuage his conscience, to put his mind at ease. That question is a simple one, but does not have a simple answer. "Who is my neighbor?" Please note that Jesus does not say, "Everybody in

your life." He does not say, "the whole planet." What does He say? He doesn't give a lawyer's answer, nor does he engage in debate with the man. He tells a story. And the story is probably one that you know. You may even know it too well. So if you know the story, what is the point of the story of the Good Samaritan? You can tell me now. There are lots of right answers.

Here's my answer: Be like the bad guy who cared practically, creatively and generously, rather than the good guys who didn't care at all.

That road from Jericho to Jerusalem is narrow, mountainous and treacherous. There would be many places for robbers to hide and beat up on an unsuspecting traveller. The man was not only robbed of whatever money he had, the thieves also took his clothes which makes him that much more vulnerable. Then to add injury to insult, they beat him up as well. So this man was more than begging on the side of the road with a Tim Horton's cup. He was completely needy. He needed to go to the hospital.

But before the age of hospitals, the mixed breed Samaritan, despised by most Jewish people, administered first aid, with oil and wine. He placed the injured man on his transportation, and took him to the nearest hotel, where he lodged him at his own expense. When Jesus got to the end of the story and asked the lawyer, who was the neighbor to the man who had been beaten up by robbers? The answer was clear: the one who had mercy on him. To which Jesus says, "Go, and do likewise."

The mission happens in light of relationship with Jesus. It is possible to say to ourselves that the person on the side of the road is none of our business, and not a neighbor that we know. But Jesus challenges that way of looking at it. The person God places in your path at that time is the one God calls you to help. Now does this mean you should always or often give money to those who beg? No. But it does mean we should ask ourselves and the Lord, what it means to care for that person.

We should know that the mission is wherever we go or stay. Because the mission is where Jesus and you, Jesus and I travel, or stay. For most of us that means Orleans. This is your mission field, because it is where you live.

The question for the mission is this: How do you respond to wounded people? In Dr. Luke's account, which is the only account of the Good Samaritan in the Bible, we find the following. For the lawyer, the wounded man was a subject to discuss.

For the robbers, the wounded man was someone to use and exploit. For the religious men, the wounded man was a problem to be avoided. For the innkeeper, the wounded man was a customer to serve for a fee. For the Samaritan, the wounded man was a human being worth being cared for and loved. For Jesus, all of them and all of us were worth dying for. Now you can go back to the story, and wonder about what your attitude is toward the wounded. We are all wounded, in various ways. We all need help. If you were beat up, and destitute on the side of the road, who would you want to be near by?

We can play out each of the characters found in the story Jesus told. But the main purpose of the story is to remind us of our mission, of the love that Jesus calls us to, and the practicality of the love working its way into our daily lives, creatively and compassionately.

Now as you hear this story anew, do you find your heart softening or hardening? Some of us who are caregivers have a fatigue toward those who are in need, because there is so much need everywhere we go. If you are in need, because you are stressed by how much you have given to an individual or an organization, even our own congregation, consider the following from the Mayo Clinic (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/caregiver-stress/art-20044784>)

Acknowledge your need and accept help. Focus on what you are able to provide. Set realistic goals. Get connected to other caregiving groups. Join a support group (or Bible Study, which can act as such for you). Seek social support for yourself. Don't try to do this outreach or caregiving all on your own. Set personal health goals. These are not Christian only suggestions, they are intended to say to each of us that we all need help. Some of us need help more acutely than others. Some of us are on the side of the road. Reach out, as you are able, both in caring and in asking for care.

And remember, your mission is where you are. Let us pray.