

“CHURCH IS SOMETHING YOU ARE, NOT WHERE YOU GO: THE MISSION IS HERE!!”

Lenten Wednesday 5

Peace Lutheran
Grass Valley, CA

March 25, 2015

Texts:

Deuteronomy 15: 4 – 11

Acts 3: 1 – 10

Luke 19: 12 – 27

Teaching Points from the Message:

1. First Baptist Church in Kingston, Oklahoma.
2. The “Beautiful Gate”, Jerusalem, Israel
3. The church is who we are. The mission of the church is us.
4. “What we have we give.
5. The mission is here, right here!

The Message:

As members of the First Baptist Church in Kingston, Oklahoma, arrived at church, they noticed a very shabbily dressed, bearded man wandering near the front of the church, poking in garbage cans. His pants were worn, his cap was dirty, his coat ripped to shreds and his shoes in a shambles. Nearly all of the worshipers were careful to give him plenty of space as they made their way from the parking lot. Some members of the church whispered comments about “that old bum” out there. The ushers eyed him with suspicion and concern. And once inside, all was forgotten until the end of the special music.

As the choir finished its anthem, the “old bum” came walking down the aisle. The murmuring in the congregation was audible. It reached its crescendo when the old man had the audacity to go all the way to the front to find a seat. It was then that the “old bum” turned and faced the congregation. Taking off his hat, wig, and fake beard, the “old bum” was transformed into the Senior Pastor, Bobby Rice, Jr. Pastor Rice then preached on the “Sin of Unconcern.” During his message he related that only two of the thousands of parishioners that day had even bothered to speak to him. One had offered him a meal; the other, a new member who was to be baptized that day, invited him to come to church. All in all, the “old bum” went unnoticed by the worshippers.

Pretty much when church is where one goes, not something one is, the cares of the world, and the mission of the church, is left at the door — sometimes going in AND going out. My point in this message -- the Church is something you are, not where you go—is the mission is at the door. The mission is here. Our mission is here.

As Peter, John and the throngs that made their way to the temple for mid-afternoon prayer time, they also noticed a “bum” at the gate called “Beautiful”. Had they been paying any attention they would recognize him. Surely they had seen him before. He was a lame man, lame from birth, who had been carried to that spot every single day of his life. Carried to that spot to beg and plea for help, for a few coins.

However, it seems, people had been relatively inattentive. Certainly inattentive enough that the man remains nameless — as does his family. Inattentive enough that the name of the “Beautiful Gate” is more significant than the identity of the lame man. Inattentive enough that even the lame man has stopped looking directly at the passing worshippers from whom he is seeking aid. Inattentive enough that day after day they passed by without seeing the opportunity at their doorstep for mission.

Then, in the middle of the prayers, just before the first “Amen”, the man barged into the temple. Walking and leaping and praising God. Walking and leaping with shouts of song right up to the altar. It took a bit for them to recognize him. When he was identified as the “old bum” from the Beautiful Gate, they were full of wonder and amazement. Full of wonder that God has acted. Full of amazement that they had found him pretty irrelevant in their pursuit of life, God, prayer and worship.

I think there is a clear message in this story. If the only thing the church does is “go up to pray”, then we are pretty likely to leave our mission at the “beautiful gate.” We are likely to ignore the fact that Church’s mission and action might be at the door. We are more likely to think, “I’ve gone up to pray; my work is done.” We’re more likely to think, “I’ve given my few coins, people are served.”

On the other hand, when “Church is something you are”, you carry Christ, you carry mission, you carry the peace of Christ past the doors and gates of the temple. You carry the action of church out there. You recognize that there is power in the name of Jesus. There is power in being the church. When the silver and the gold is all gone, (sometimes silver and gold is our excuse for not getting involved — we can pay for mission) we come to recognize that all we have to give is ourselves, the name of Jesus and the power of the Spirit that makes us Church, that binds us into the body that is Christ—so when we give ourselves we give Jesus!!”

Church is who we are. Church is mission. The mission of the church isn’t too far outside of these doors, not too far away from where we live and play and work. The mission is here. We’re saved to serve. As those saved to serve, God expects us to get past the gates and to give what we have and what we are.

So, just what does “the mission here” look like? What is the practical application of our faith?

What I sometimes hear is a thought that “mission field” is something in some other part of the world. With that thinking, we can easily dismiss the “at the gate” idea of mission. “Well, I’ll never go to Africa (or name your spot) so this ‘mission talk’ doesn’t apply to me.

Friends, it does apply. Our mission is at the gate. We constantly live in a “mission field.” Here is your mission field:

- 1) The people who sit in front of you and behind you in worship. Notice who they are. Notice when they aren’t here. Check up on them. Pray for them. Get to know them a bit better. Support them and encourage them in their faith walk.
- 2) The people who live on either side of you. You are closer to them than anyone else. Love them. Support them. If they are of faith, encourage them. If they are not be a witness in your loving actions. Get to know their needs. Serve them. Pray!
- 3) Your family. We all have family members for whom “church” is a distant thought or not even a thought. Our witness in our actions here is key. And, perhaps our biggest mission field is our grandchildren. Where faith has skipped a generation, we can be the ones who tell our Grandchildren the God stories and introduce them to Jesus.
- 4) People with whom you interact and cross paths. Notice the name of the person who checks you out at WalMart, or any other store. Call them by name. Ask how their day is going. Encourage them with “Thank you!” and “You’re good at your job.” (If they are, of course.) You might even get a chance to ask if you can pray for them, or even invite them to church.

That’s your mission field. Right here at the “beautiful gate” of PLC.

There is the story of the master violinist (Nicolo Paganini) who, it is said, willed his elegant violin to the city of Genoa, Italy. But there was a condition on his gift, the violin was never to be used again. It was a gift designated for preservation . . . not for service.

God has gifted us for service. As the church, we are in mission. Our calling is to give a boost to the Kingdom of God by our very sense of who we are, church, the body of Christ, God’s own people active in the world, useful and beneficial for service!!

The mission is here!! As those gifted with Peace, those with the Gospel of Peace to share, those with souls large enough to live for others we share the expansive joy of peace.

Amen.