

“Missio Dei”

A Sermon by Rev. Victoria ByRoade Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Sunday, July 25, 2010 Scripture: Luke 11:1-13

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION: *We look to you, Teaching God, for help when our words stumble, or when our words come freely but our thoughts are elsewhere. We rely on your Spirit to guide and direct us. Hear us! Save us! Amen.*

I guess I hadn't thought about how many of you really check out the sermon titles we put on the sign out on the corner. I know several people asked me and evidently we had some calls in the office, too, asking what Missio Dei is.

For those of you who wondered, Missio Dei is a Latin term meaning, literally, “the mission of God”. Missio Dei is God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world and who is actively involved in and with the world. It embraces both church and world, and the church is privileged to be called to participate in God's mission. This concept, though not the exact words, have been attributed to Karl Barth who believed that all theology, including mission, begins with God and could never be conceived as a human activity. Without allowing God's mission to be our mission, we would be simply another group of people with good intentions. It is when we rely on God's wisdom, God's grace and God's leading that we are an expression of His church and one of God's instruments for accomplishing God's purposes in the world.

As I was reading our Gospel lesson for today – the story of Jesus' disciples asking him to teach them to pray – somehow all of that came to mind. The reason for that, I think, is that Jesus' response was not “Pray these words”, but rather, “Pray this way”. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus gives us a model and a way of being with

God so that the realm of God will come into our lives and our world. Consider the following scenario. Imagine yourself as the child and again as the parent in this scene:

“The child smells of baby shampoo and toothpaste, decked out in fresh pajamas and ready to slide between the clean sheets. The parent on duty follows the bedtime ritual: The light is turned down; the edges of warm light still float in from the other room; the covers are pulled up and tucked in just so; and then this parent sits close, like only a parent can do. It is prayer time. The day is remembered. Gratitude is offered for what adults forget to name, yet is so sacred. There is a concern for a grandparent or a pet. There is squirming, but it isn't restless. It is engaged squirming. It is exuberant squirming. The prayer includes the words, but the prayer also includes the ritual, the closeness, memory, and the presence of something more for both the child and the parent.”

Jesus' invitation to “pray this way” is an invitation into this *more* that is a gift of God's grace. This prayer invites us into an intimate relationship. “Our Father...hallowed be your name.” What happens when you bring yourself to this Parent God who calls you beloved? It is intimate. It is comforting. It is also overwhelming because we are confronted by the truth about ourselves. It is freeing because the burden of “I'm in control” gives way to the realization that God is the author and finisher of the universe, not us. It is humbling because of the grace we experience when God overflows into all of our relationships.

This “Father” to whom we pray is Jesus' “Abba”. This is the one who creates, who provides and who sustains, who forgives, who knows the truth, and who holds all things together. This is “Our Father.” This is the God of our faith and our history. This is the God of mystery that surprises and enlivens us.

This prayer invites us into a new

location – “in heaven...” It moves us; it relocates us out of our place and into God's place. It seems that heaven is hidden much of the time. Heaven can be hidden by our intellect. Heaven can be hidden by our fear or our ignorance. It can be hidden by our deep need to be in control. This prayer is a gift of a new location. Maybe heaven is above, maybe heaven is deep within. The practice of prayer moves us so that our lives may be in the same location as God's grace. It is the experience of “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Writer Ann Lamott says that all of her prayers are either, “Help me! Help me! Help me!” or “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”. Prayer is the difficult and honest business of allowing God's grace to name our needs and desires as they emerge in our daily lives. Prayer is the soulful response of gratitude for all God is doing.

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught is disciples.” The request is simple enough. It is a request anyone might make at some time.

And in Jesus' response to them – the words of the “Lord's Prayer” we are reminded of God's greatness, God's graciousness, and God's goodness. In the Jewish culture, God's name was unutterable. But Jesus directs his disciples to call the one whose name is “hallowed” and “exalted, “Father”, “Abba” (a diminutive not unlike “daddy”) God is bringing in the Kingdom, directing all creation. Yet “our Father” cares for each one of us and will provide us with our “daily bread.” God is all-powerful, righteous, and just. Yet the most God-like act we can practice is to “forgive everyone indebted to us “even as God forgives our sins.”

We come to church and are told to share the story of Jesus with our neighbors, but we have trouble just remembering our neighbors'

names. We come and hear that we should care for strangers, but it is hard enough to care for the people we live with. We come to church and God calls us to love the world, but the world is not always loveable.

Coming to church is demanding. Following Jesus is hard. As an example Jesus is overwhelming. Nobody is going to be mistaking any of us for Jesus any time soon.

People who try to live for Christ have good reasons to be discouraged. The needs of the world are so big and our resources are so limited.

If we love the way God calls us to love the world, our hearts will end up broken, because the world does not seem to be getting better.

Jesus commands us to be peacemakers, so it is discouraging that the world is at war.

It has always been difficult to follow Christ. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, I don't think it had anything at all to do with their method. I think they saw between Jesus and God a relationship which they wanted, too. But when Jesus taught them how to pray, the disciples must have thought, "He's not making this any easier. We've been praying for God to set the world right and it isn't happening. Forgiving everyone is way too much to ask. Keeping our distance from all evil doesn't sound like much fun either."

But we, like the disciples, keep praying. We keep coming to the table to be fed by God, because at the heart of all our prayers, God is what we are praying for.

I know that those of you have been faithful in your attendance these last few weeks are aware that we have been discussing the meaning of membership, and I can't help but think that today's text is an important one on which we should concentrate. And I think that because if we are God's people, if the church is the body of Christ in the world, shouldn't our first priority be to ask God who it is He wants us

to be and what He wants us to do?

As our Directory of Worship says, "Prayer is the heart of worship. In prayer, through the Holy Spirit, people seek after and are found by the one true God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ. They listen and wait for God, call God by name, remember God's gracious acts, and offer themselves to God." (W-2.1001)

Another thing I know most of you are aware is that First Church is in the midst of following a growth plan created by the Growth Task Force directed by session and commissioned by you, the congregation. And if I can assure you of anything it is that that group of people has based their decisions, their plans, their programs, and initiatives on what they have recognized as God's will for this church. It was in that manner that they created the new mission statement which is: "The mission of the First Presbyterian Church of Dunedin is to worship God joyfully, love all people genuinely, help those in need selflessly and share the gospel of salvation freely."

This mission statement, my friends, is not just a goal or directive for the programs of First Church, I truly believe that it is the *Missio Dei*. Through conversation, prayer, discussion and meditation, this group you empowered has become one in which:

- Relationship has become the primary mode of being
- A "new location" in God's grace has become the center of life together.
- The honest naming of the needs, desires, fears, and hopes has led to a discernment of ministry and mission
- And gratitude has become the response to all of life.

As members of this family of faith, it be so, as well, for you and for me. Amen.

I owe much of the ideas and format of this sermon to Andrew Dreitcer for his study on this text, "Pray This Way". Thanks, also, to Leonard Sweet for his sermon, "Our Father...", Brett Younger for his sermon, "Asking, Seeking, Knocking", and the Book of Order for the P.C.(U.S.A.).

"Missio Dei"

A Sermon by Rev. Victoria ByRoade
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 25 2010

Luke 11:1-13



The First Presbyterian Church
of Dunedin

455 Scotland Street

Dunedin, Florida 34698

(727) 733-2318 fax (727) 738-4297

WEBSITE: fpcdunedin.org

E-mail: officeadminfpc@tampabay.rr.com

Victoria ByRoade, Pastor