

FINDING OUR REASON FOR BEING

Luke 4:14-21

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One of the most helpful organizations I belonged to as a teenager was the Future Farmers of America. What little I know about public speaking, organizational leadership and parliamentary procedure I learned from this association. The FFA opened its meetings with a distinctive ritual. The president called the meeting to order and immediately asked "Future Farmers of America, why are we here?"

Jesus wanted people to know why he was here, so he went back to his hometown synagogue, read from the prophet Isaiah about the Jewish Jubilee, rolled up the scroll, sat down and declared "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*" "*This is why I have come.*"

Let us consider today our reason for being. We spend over four million dollars annually and we spend a lot of time together. Individually and collectively it is a pretty good thing to know why we are here. So today I pose the question "Brentwood United Methodists, why are we here?" And I propose in this sermon to give an answer.

WE ARE HERE TO WORSHIP GOD.

Alex was standing in the narthex of a local church looking at a plaque hanging on the wall dedicated to members who had lost their lives in military service. The pastor walked up to Alex, put his arm around him and said, "Do you know what that is? That is a memorial to all our members who died in the service." Alex thought for a moment and asked, "Which one, the 8:30 or the 11:00 a.m. service?"

I suppose there are those who think worship can bore you to death but I beg to differ. Worship is the heartbeat of a congregation. As worship goes, so goes the Church. The worst nine weeks of my life were the weeks I was separated from worship. The trauma is still so deep I can hardly talk about it. I badgered and begged doctors to let me return. I did not feel relieved from responsibility, I felt alienated from community. Sunday morning television stinks, including religious TV. The weeks had no beginning and no end. The days all ran together. You did not need me. In fact, worship attendance increased during my absence. I needed you. I needed to hear the music, say the prayers, have my heart strangely warmed. I needed to worship God.

A.W. Tozer said, "I would rather worship God than do any other thing I know of in this world." Worship is not about me, it's not about you. Worship is about God. It's about praising God and enjoying him forever. May His name be magnified and our lives be sanctified when we gather here.

WE ARE HERE TO MAKE DISCIPLES.

In Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass, Alice wanders aimlessly through a strange kingdom until she comes to a fork in the road. She looks left, she looks right, then exclaims, "Which way shall I go?" That's when a Cheshire cat with a broad grin inquires "Where are you going?" Alice replies, "I don't know." "Well," says the cat, "then it doesn't matter. If you don't know where you are going any road will get you there."

Disciples know where they are going. They are following Jesus. They are on the river of life. They have made a commitment to live for Him who died for them. They may not know the details, but they know their destiny. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?

What is the center of your life? Is it money, work, possessions, pleasure, family, self? Why not be Christ centered? Why not put Christ at the center of your life and let everything else fall into place around it. You will be forever restless until you are willing to place Christ at the very center of your life. You were made for that purpose and to that end.

I was stuck in Baltimore a few years ago trying to get home from Florida on Southwest Airlines in a snowstorm. The terminal was packed with people delayed just like me. Some had been there all night. Tempers were flaring. People were cursing. Cell phones were ringing. As I sat next to the ticket counter, I noticed the clerk to be unusually calm and courteous to customers as they ranted and raved to her about their dilemma. The lady wore a WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelet on her wrist. As I got up to board the plane I said to her, "Thank you for practicing what you wear. Today you did what Jesus would do." With a big smile she said, "I try to do what Jesus would do every day."

That's what disciples do. They are not perfect, just forgiven. Not proud, just grounded; not wandering, just following the One who called them to be disciples. They are just trying to do every day what Jesus would do.

WE ARE HERE TO SERVE THE WORLD.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. He had a dream that one day his four children would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. With this faith he believed people could turn the mountain of despair into the mountain of hope, and transform the jungling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony. We are better people because Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream.

A few years ago a handful of Brentwood members had a dream that we could help the people of Perovo, Russia, have a building to house their struggling congregation. Bishop Minor came to this Sanctuary and spoke to that dream. Today the Perovo United Methodist Church has a bakery that will soon be serving

living bread and everlasting water in worship services thanks to the \$250,000 sent from you to purchase a building. Perovo is a better place because you had a dream.

One of our teenagers thought she ought to do something about hunger in Nashville. So she single handedly organized a food drive for Nashville Rescue Mission. She gave you empty grocery bags and told her story to community businesses. She collected 2700 pounds of food and \$2,000. That's what God will do for a dream.

I have a dream today that Brentwood United Methodist Church will revitalize a neighborhood and find new ways to alleviate suffering in the greater Nashville area. You are already doing it through Room in the Inn, Habitat for Humanity, tutoring at 61st Avenue, Hobson UMC Vacation Bible School, Kadash Barnea and others.

Jesus said, *"I have come to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, the recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* We have only just begun to follow Jesus. Let us not turn back now.

WE ARE HERE TO HEAL THE BROKENHEARTED.

A sign over an Italian hotel which once served as a hospital states it this way, "To heal sometimes, to comfort often, to care always." We need to write that on our hearts.

An interesting thing has happened in the field of medicine. While mainline churches have abandoned their ownership of hospitals and alienated themselves from the healing industry, doctors and medical centers have taken up religious activities. Doctors, some in our own congregation, now feel called to pray with patients before medical procedures.

If religion were vitamin X instead of prayer and attendance at religious activities, it would be recommended by every state's department of health says Dr. John Tarpley, professor of surgery at Vanderbilt. At Tennessee Christian Medical Center the staff gathers every morning in the hospital chapel to pray for patients by name.

According to a Newsweek survey, 70% of Americans often pray for better health for themselves or a family member, and 72% would welcome it if their doctor asked them about their religion or spirituality.

When it comes to healing and wholeness, when is the Church going to be the Church? When is the Church going to rise again to its healing ministry? Are we going to leave it to the independents and the fundamentalists to be about the healing ministry or are we going to take it back into mainline churches of Protestantism in this world? That is a question I would like to raise with you

today.

Heal me hands of Jesus and search out all my pain
Restore my hope, remove my fear, and bring me peace again.

It's time to recover the power of prayer. It's time to extend the compassion of Christ. It's time to comfort those who mourn. It's time to build up the brokenhearted. May the Gentle Healer make himself known in our midst today.

WE ARE HERE TO EXTEND AN INVITATION.

In a Seinfeld dialogue between Elaine and her boyfriend, Elaine asks, "Do you believe in God?" Her boyfriend replies, "Yes." "Is it a problem that I am not religious?" continues Elaine. "Not for me," replies her boyfriend. "How's that?" she asks. And her boyfriend says, "I'm not the one going to hell."

Do you believe people are lost without God?
Do you believe that lost people matter to God?
Do we have any responsibility to introduce lost
people to Jesus Christ?

In 1990 14.3 million Americans said they had no religion. By 2001 the number had grown to 29.4 million who claim no religious affiliation.

Mission field is no longer around the world; it is around the neighborhood, in the school, on the job, at the soccer field. We no longer need to send people around the world; we need to become missionaries ourselves, convinced of the saving power of Jesus Christ. That is our mission.

To invite is to ask, to attract, it is to beckon and to bid, to request and to receive, it is to warrant and to welcome. There are no finer words in the English language than those which say, "You are invited" or "The honor of your presence is requested."

When churches begin they are intent on inviting others if for no other reason than survival. They need help building buildings, developing programs and employing people to form a church. When churches are successful in outreach they reach another natural pinch point. There comes a time when they spend so much time caring for one another little, if any, time is left for search and rescue missions. When this happens, churches become ingrown and begin to die.

We must return to the search and rescue business.

Throw out the lifeline, across the dark wave
There is a brother whom someone should save.
Somebody's brother, oh who then will dare
To throw out the lifeline, his peril to share?

As the service came to a close in a country church, the song leader stepped to the

platform and said, “Let us sing #654— Till the Whole World Knows.” A little kid who was already tired leaned over to her dad and said, “I think we are going to be here for a very long time.”

Whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, and wherever it takes us, let us be a Christian fellowship biblically focused on making disciples through worshiping, discipling, serving, healing, and inviting till the whole world knows they are loved by God. That is why we are here. Amen.

