

Advent

As we begin the advent season let us think about what this season represents. It is the time of anticipation, when we know that the Lord is coming but he is not yet here. We can mark it as a time when we can proclaim the coming birth, the love of God and our own story of faith and salvation becomes more real, more now. Our verses and our testimony both admonish us not to hide our lamps, to let our lights shine. The testimony tells us “Be a lamp to light the way” Jesus tells the disciples in Matthew to let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. These link the proclamation with an effect on others. By proclaiming our God now we are helping to bring him into sharp focus for others.

First Sunday after Covenant

In addition, this morning is the first Sunday service after we have committed ourselves to the Lord individually through the covenant service, but individual commitment is not enough. Our testimony and our verses indicate that we have a special mission and that we act as a Group. The Word Community is used very explicitly in the testimony and Jesus was teaching the disciples and used the example of a city. Essentially we are part of a Christian team with the goal of proclaiming the Lord to others. When we don't proclaim God and Jesus then we risk others not hearing the word that is so important to conversion and faith. Let's think about it as being on Team Jesus. Though we are individually committed to Christ, we also cannot effectively work for him without the team that we are a part of. This morning we are going to talk about what our church is called to as a group and what we bring to team Jesus as players. The great mission of this team is found in Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. So how does this translate into our church, into our team.

Mission

First our church has a mission and set of core beliefs. Each of us as members has agreed that we support this mission and core values just by our presence in this church. They hang on the bulletin board on the women's side, and I assume somewhere on the Men's side. The mission is that we, empowered by the Holy Spirit, guide and support one another in the development of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We reach out to all in need, offering the support of our Christian Community. This mission outlines not just what we as individuals do but also what we as a church must do to extend Christ to

others, to reach out to all in need, offering the support of our Christian Community. It is within this part of the mission that we can find the great commission of Jesus to go out and preach. Clearly, that has been an integral part of our church from the beginning with many of those who have gone before us going out to preach and teach without the benefit of a plan, just going where God led them, often into trouble and hardship. When did this stop? We clearly make little claim to going out today as part of team Jesus.

Dance marathon

Last year I watched my daughter and her friends as they prepared for the dance marathon at the University of Iowa. They raised 1 million dollars. Imagine, a bunch of college kids dancing to help those who can't help themselves and raising 1 million dollars doing it. It required each of them to go to friends and neighbors and strangers to explain what they were raising money for and why the person should give. Aren't we called to do the same for Christ, not raising money but raising believers. Isn't our greatest charge not to be faithful ourselves but after being faithful to go out and preach and teach? Where are we doing this in a purposeful way today? Are we warming the bench on Team Jesus or are we angling to play on the first string?

Core values

Our core values add a bit more light to the mission. We believe that a Christian community operates in a caring fashion, in the necessary education for spiritual growth, in promoting peace and humility through our quiet worship, using our heritage as a foundation, being individually accountable to God, conforming our daily walk to our foundational beliefs, and having a personal knowledge and relationship with Christ. None of these allows for the outreach needed to preserve our position on Team Jesus. Though these are laudable core values and will serve to make us better Christians they will not further the united effort required to further God's work here on earth. Just one of the core values, the one I haven't read yet, does that. We believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in our church today. Do we believe that? Do any of us think that we would recognize the Spirit should he walk in today? Would we expect the Spirit to be a man, a woman, black, what would the Spirit look like? Could there be a *werkzeug* in this church, in this community?

Get to the point

Why do I go on so? Because as this commentary developed I could feel the desperation of this church and our Lord in wanting us to act. To stop sitting on hard benches just because that's how it always was and ask ourselves what do the hard benches mean today. Rather than just sitting uncomfortably on Sunday maybe we need to live uncomfortably from Monday through Saturday. After our solemn and sincere covenant with God it seems particularly important to think about what our church is doing. To ask ourselves whether we are serving the Lord through this church today and every day.

The right question

At the School Board convention in Des Moines a speaker said this about young people in school today "It isn't the answer that matters as much as asking the right question". It isn't the answer that matters as much as asking the right question? Do we need to reformulate our question? Years ago the question was how do we make it possible for our faith to flourish and be recognized. The need for freedom of worship was tantamount, but today. Today the question is not one of freedom to worship, we have that and squander it every day. Rather, the question is how do we move our Lord's purpose, the purpose of preaching to all nations to spread the good news, to tell the story that belongs to each one of us and to us as a congregation? That is the question, a new question. If we ask that question then we are directing ourselves to new answers.

Stretch goals

The speaker also said this "I'd rather have a child set 10 stretch goals and reach 8 than have them set 5 mediocre goals and meet them all". What is the stretch goal for this church? Where could we end up if we just hung ourselves out there as a team and fought and scrapped for Jesus? What good is freedom of religion if it leads to apathy. What good are traditions if they block the progress to God's purpose. Why do we need forms like benches and walls and handshakes if they do not move and shake the very ground on which we exist.

Closing

We close with an admonishment from our testimony Tell one another. Make it known through the land that the Lord's work will be gravely delayed if you continue in your present ways. Soon, not a trace of your divine life will remain. Renew your willpower. What sort of an example are you setting for all who come and seek something better and believe they might find it in this Community?