

“It’s God’s Kingdom, Dude!”

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Matthew 4:12, 18-23 = God’s mission

First years of ministry in Milford, TX, I was called to intervene by the County Sheriff himself, in an incident involving the patrician Rosson sisters, a couple of spinsters living in one of the nicest homes in town. Then in their 80’s, Mattie Lowe, retired English teacher, and Mary Emma, retired High School Latin teacher were the kind of ladies who give afternoon teas for the church women on the best china ~ not at all the types to be seen shooting up the neighborhood.



A skunk had entered their garden and Mary Emma was shooting at it with their father’s ancient horse pistol. Even with her glasses she was almost blind. With each shot the skunk didn’t even flinch, just placidly continued munching on tomatoes while Mary Emma was shooting all over the place completely wide of the mark.

With her shooting everywhere except the direction of the skunk, the deputies thought it the better part of wisdom to send in an expendable, like the pastor. I waited out of gun range until Mary Emma was reloading. I announced myself, walked over and on disarming her, talked her back into the house.

Churches are unfortunately prone to do the same thing ~ to get “ready, fire,” then “take aim.” Many congregations go off, pardon the pun “halfcocked,” attempting to do God’s mission before they have actually discerned what God’s mission is. That is why it is best to engage in a through-going, in-depth mission discernment process before ~ so as to avoid dissipating limited resources on things not part of God’s plan.



What is God’s mission? In our text today about the calling of Peter and Andrew, James and John, it begins with:



“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” and it ends with

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom”

So maybe the kingdom is important to Jesus. Just maybe Jesus’ personal mission statement has something to do with God’s reign.

In Mark 4, Jesus gives us the “Parable of the Sower” where he compares God’s realm to a sower going out and sowing seeds rather carelessly, more or less at random. While some of the seed does well, most of the seed falls on unhospitable soil and dies.



God wants us to sow the seeds of the kingdom in the places God indicates, not carelessly, not at random ~ to focus our mission, to have clarity of our God-given purpose ~ to focus our limited resources where God wishes.

A thoroughgoing study of the Gospels reveals that Jesus’ personal mission statement is Matthew 6:33:

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.”



Now this is where I get into deep trouble. It is not over the verse per se, but over my personal translation of it:



That’s what this sermon was originally titled. You can’t imagine the pushback it has engendered. There’s no telling what will offend some folks. So then I’ve tried to explain:

“I’m just aiming for the sharp focus of Bill Clinton’s uber-successful mission statement that got him elected ~ twice? You remember it, right:”



Well, that just makes things worse. So I've mellowed. It's now:



Matthew 6:33 is a good guide, an excellent prescription for keeping our priorities straight: “Focus everything on God’s dream ~ for you ~ and for the world,”

Mission Statements are important tools for ministry and mission. Healthy churches know well their God-given mission, and more importantly, they use their Mission Statements to guide their ministries, to select what they need to add, and just as importantly but much harder, to select the things better to let go.



Not even our largest congregations have the resources to be all things to all people. Healthy, large congregations almost always have a very clear and concise understanding of their particular call from God. Prioritizing everything means we prioritize nothing. Good mission statements help us decide what really needs to be done, and more importantly, what we don't need to do.

Successful organizations know and live their mission statements. One of the greatest, most focused mission statements of all time is Komatsu Corporation's two word mission statement adapted when they were not yet a blip on the radar:



“Kill Caterpillar”

The best mission statements are short, lean and clear like that. Let's look at a couple of healthy, successful, growing churches, from among those who don't have a one-size-fits-all generic mission statement ~ congregations which work hard to embody their God-given mission.

From Ascension Episcopal an evangelical congregation in Orlando:



“Making Disciples
Who Make Disciples”

What a concept! New Life PC near Orlando did their Mission Statement first and then organized their missions and councils around it, structured itself around its highest priority functions. What an idea!



“Gather Disciples;
Grow Disciples;
Send Disciples”

These from growing churches are concise, helpful and give clear guidance. Not everything we do is as important as everything else. Clear Mission Statements help us organize around the highest priority missions, not get lost in the static which easily drowns out the mission.

What makes for a effective Mission Statement? #1 ~ Is it actual? It should be authentic and real. The question for all mission statements is:

Is it just a series of buzzwords signifying nothing? Is it lived or merely a dead letter on a page?

What makes for a good Mission Statement? #2 ~ is it transformational? The very best mission statements describe the transformation the organization is called to effect. Little league for example:

“Spectators Become Sportsters”

Scouting:

“Guiding Youth to Become Confident Young Adults”

Very few congregation’s Mission Statements are that clear, concise, lived out and most of all, indicative of their transformation target. Some examples:

“Guiding the Self-Reliant into Vital Discipleship”

“Rescuing People from Cultural Christianity to Becoming Followers of Jesus”

“Inviting the Distracted and Disinterested to Realize Their Role in God’s Story”

We must ask ourselves: “What is the transformation which happens through our ministries?” Shouldn’t that be somewhere in our short, concise, lived out and transformational Mission Statement?

We’ve got a mission statement, right? Worked out carefully and prayerfully some years ago ~ everybody knows it right? Can anyone repeat it? In vital churches, you can ask almost anyone and they know it. I just saw it for the first time yesterday:

“called by God to be a global, caring community of faith,
centered in Jesus Christ,
training people to share his life everywhere we go.
Our top three priorities are ...
To worship the Lord with heart, soul and strength.
To engage our neighbors in central Montgomery Co.
To equip each generation for Christian discipleship”

I also leave it to you to determine if it is clear, concise, lived out and transformational. It is not my intention in any way to disrespect our current Mission Statement nor to discount the faithful work of the one’s who crafted it. It’s appropriateness for the time is not in question here.



Rather I am suggesting merely that the “Time’s They Are A-Changin’” and healthy congregations are constantly updating their mission for the present and into God’s future. No Mission Statement is permanent, and now is our time to revisit and revise it in light of our rapidly changing context for ministry.

I need to ask: are we to be found among those who, like Mary Emma Rosson cannot even see the target?" Or are we going to look forward to a through-going Mission Study where we develop a clear, concise, lived out and transforming Mission Statement which both discerns and leads us into God's future. It's in our hands if we do this with integrity and authenticity. So we might focus on what Jesus focused: "It's God's Kingdom, Dude!"

