

Our Mission & Our Vision

Ephesians 4:11-16

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch
Copyright © 2006, Bill Couch. All rights reserved worldwide.
This material may be printed or copied for personal use only.

What is the purpose of LakeRidge United Methodist Church? What is the main thing we are about? I want us to focus this morning on our mission and our vision. And I want each of us to wrestle with the question: Am I on board moving the church toward accomplishing its purpose? Am I on board for accomplishing my purpose? In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes for us the purpose of every local church.

Ephesians 4:11-16

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12] to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up [13] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

[14] Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. [15] Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. [16] From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Vision leaks. Keeping a vision challenges us to remain focused on the things that really matter eternally. Life happens to us. We have jobs to do, we have households to run and we have family obligations. Before we know it, we are just going through the motions. We are doing what we feel like we have to do. Do you feel that your life has a purpose? Do you know what your purpose is? Are you making a difference that will matter for eternity?

I want us to focus on our purpose as a church and how your purpose in life is vitally linked to the purpose of the church. Will you say with me the four components of our mission statement? We are seeking to be a community that is accepting, transforming, equipping and sending. What is our vision? Seeking life changing encounters with Jesus Christ. Let's unpack our mission statement. Our mission statement describes the kind of environment in which we grow spiritually. The goal is that each of us within this environment will "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13) That means that we will live up to our fullest potential. We will become everything that Christ has created us to be.

It is within the context of an accepting community that we begin our spiritual journey. Before we can accept the possibility of changing, we want to know that we are accepted as we are with all our failures, flaws and fragility. God does not ask us to clean ourselves up before we come to him. He does not ask us to measure up to a certain standard. He only asks that we come honestly to him admitting our need for forgiveness and a willingness to turn from our self-centered life and put God at the center. The first three steps of Alcoholic's Anonymous describe this process well:

- **Step One:** “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.” Substitute for the “alcohol” whatever your addiction is: work, lust, control, materialism, food. All of us have something other than God we have allowed to control us.
- **Step Two:** “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” We admit that we cannot fix our lives whatever mess they are in. Sanity means to restore to wholeness--what our lives were intended to be.
- **Step Three:** “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.” The key is turning over our will to God. We quit running our lives and ask God to start running our lives.

Jesus came into the world accepting people who knew that they had messed up their lives and who desired a new start with God at the center. He forgave a woman caught in the act of adultery and offered her a new start: “Go and sin no more.” He told us that God was like a father who embraced his prodigal son. The son had rejected the father, demanded his share of the inheritance prematurely. Inheritances only come after the parent passes away. This son was so rebellious he could not wait for his father to die. He took half of his father’s estate and squandered it in wild living. Then when he was broke and starving and sleeping with pigs, he came

home. His father ran to meet him, embraced him and said, “Welcome home, son. I love you.” Jesus was accused of being a friend of sinners. That is why he is our friend. We are all sinners. A sinner is anyone who has lived a self-centered life. Jesus has accepted us as we are.

Our church needs to reflect what God is like to the world. We have a God who has accepted us as we are. Therefore our church needs to offer that same acceptance to everyone. Are you on board with being an accepting community? Do you accept others as God as has accepted you?

Do you warmly welcome people who are different from you to our church? Do you welcome people of different races? God is the creator of all races. He has made them all equal. He loves and accepts them all. Do we reflect that love to people of different race? I’m thrilled that we have people of different races coming to our church. But unfortunately I’ve heard that some people have acted rudely and even made racial remarks around them. That is simply called racial prejudice. I’ve noticed that people who are racially prejudiced are insecure. They don’t know who they are, so they have to pretend that they are better than someone else. If you are not welcoming people of all races here, you are insecure. You need to remember who you are. You are sinner accepted and loved by God just as you are. And you need to offer that same acceptance

and love to everyone. When you see someone of a different race visiting our church, I hope you will go up to them, smile, introduce yourself and say: “I’m glad you are here. Is there anyway I can help you?”

Another thing that I’m thrilled to see is that we have some ex-convicts beginning to come to our church. These men accepted Christ through our Kairos Prison ministry. They come looking for a place to be accepted and to start a new life. Will we give them the same chance that Christ gave us? Or have we forgotten that we are all sinners saved by the grace of God and given a second chance?

One of our staff who came from a different part of the country shared last week that he has not felt totally accepted in our church because he dresses a little differently from most West Texans. Are you on board with helping to make our church a truly accepting community? If not, you need to look at your heart. There is something seriously wrong. You have forgotten how Jesus accepted you.

Although God accepts us as we are, he never leaves us where we are. God wants to transform us so that we can become all that he created us to be. When Jesus began his ministry he announced his purpose; why he had come. He quoted from the Old Testament:

Luke 4:18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
[19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus came to set prisoners free. Dan Hiers, who is a recovering drug addict and served eleven years in prison for drug related charges, spoke to our drug prevention teams last week. He mentioned that he lived in both an invisible and a visible prison. His invisible prison was his addiction to drugs. He was trapped and he saw no way out. Jesus came and set him free from his invisible prison. Many of us are trapped in an invisible prison. We are trapped by some destructive habit, some addiction that is destroying our families and us. We can see no way out. We are powerless. Transformation occurs when we ask Jesus to set us free from invisible our prisons.

Jesus came to give recovery of sight to the blind. Jesus came to heal. He came to heal us not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. One of the major things that holds you back from becoming all that God created you to be is an emotional or spiritual wound. Somewhere in your past you have been deeply hurt. You have been abandoned by a parent or spouse. You have been abused by a family member who was supposed to have protected you. You have been ridiculed or

ostracized by peers. As a result of these wounds you feel damaged and depressed. You are full of hurt, anger and bitterness. You don't know how to get over this wound. Transformation occurs when we ask Jesus to heal the hurts. He can heal the deepest wound and set us free from the bitterness, the anger and resentment.

Jesus came to release the oppressed. You may be oppressed by the circumstances of your life. Life has dealt you one misery after another. You may be angry at God because life has not been fair to. You may be overwhelmed with guilt because of things you have done in the past. You feel oppressed by life or guilt. Transformation means that you allow Jesus to set you free from whatever is oppressing you.

Transformation is a process. It is not a one time event. God is constantly setting us free to become all that he intended us to be. Are you on board? Are you seeking life changing encounters with Jesus Christ? Or are you content to stay where you are?

LakeRidge also seeks to be an equipping church. We create an environment in which you can discover the specific purpose for which God created you. The two most important days of your life are when you are born and secondly when you discover what you are born for. Your fulfillment in life comes through faithfully carrying out God's purpose for your life. Equipping is the process of helping you to discover the gifts and abilities that God has given you for

serving him and others. You were created for a life of significance not mere existence. In a couple of weeks, I'm going to talk more about how to discover your spiritual gift(s).

Paul tells us that church leaders are to equip the people of God for ministry. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service." (Ephesians 4:11, 12) To translate into modern language: "It was he who gave some to be church leaders to prepare God's people for works of service." The role of our church staff is not to get you to help us do our ministry. The role of the staff is to help you discover your ministry—your "work of service" in the world. We are always asking you this question: "What is God calling you to do?" The church staff is here to help you, equip you to that. Are you on board with being equipped? Are you discovering what God is calling you to do?

LakeRidge is also a sending community. Once you have discovered your calling, your place of serving Christ in the world, we want to send you forth with a team of people to help you fulfill your purpose. No one serves Christ alone. Paul says we are the Body of Christ in the world. The body is composed of many parts, not just one part. We work together as a body, as a team to fulfill our purpose and to serve Christ. You may be sent out to make a difference in the drug problem in our community. We'll talk more

about that next week. You may be sent out to make a difference for the homeless. You may be sent to lead Bible Study in a prison. You may be sent to serve in city hall or as a leader in the business community. Some of you have been sent out to lead in the United Way campaign. Two of our members have assumed top leadership: Michael Shonrock and Regina Johnston. Twenty-four of you have been equipped and sent out to be small group leaders for youth. Some of you have been sent out to be prayer intercessors walking the streets of our city praying for light to come into places of darkness. Are you on board? Are you ready to be sent out?

God has something significant for you to do. He wants your life to matter for eternity. Are you on board with God's purpose for you life?