



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“Mission One”

Ephesians 4:11-16 2 Timothy 1:3-7, 13-14; 2:1-2, 4:5

Renewal of Baptism; Healing Ministry

Listen for the Word of God FOR US THIS MORNING, in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 11-16, from the New International Version. *[Text]*

What are we doing here?

Today we have an opportunity for anyone who has already been baptized to renew their baptism vows, followed by our healing ministry. When we were baptized, we were largely looking back--turning away from sin, cleansing the past. In our baptism renewal, we are primarily looking forward, to claim the year ahead for God.

But is that what you really want to do?

I raise this question because in the Bible messages this month, we are focusing on our church purpose in this new phase of our life together. We have said we want to “Passionately love the Lord Jesus Christ, and radiate that love to every individual.” Please say that with me-- “Passionately love the Lord Jesus Christ, and radiate that love to every individual.”

The first word is about “passion”, “desire”. The rest is about our relationship with God and our relationships with other people—just like Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40, RSV)

To put some specifics to this vision for Act Two of our church life, we prayerfully discerned four Mission Statements, and today we focus on Mission One: (We want to...) “glorify God by developing committed followers of Jesus Christ who will attract others to him.” This is a more specific way of showing our love for God and others.

It’s one thing for a church to declare a purpose statement. But if church members are not doing what the purpose claims, it’s a fiction, a dream, *wish*; the nasty word for it is, “hypocrisy”.

It reminds me of the story of the board of a major conglomerate and its advertising department that were summoned to a meeting. The Division Vice-President stood up and paced back and forth, getting more and more red-faced. “I just don’t understand it,” he said. “We have tried every advertising method known to man--for years--and our sales of our dog food line continues to decrease. We bought shelf space in the stores at strategic heights. We spent thousands re-designing our labels. We paid focus groups to tell us what they liked about our ads. We held contests and drawings. We bought tons of print ads and media coverage. But still to this day, people are just not buying our dog food. Our line is the laugh of the corporation. Now, ladies and gentlemen, what are we going to do about it?!” There was a long silence. Then a

young guy from the advertising department in the back of the room raised his hand and said, timidly, “But sir, the dogs don’t like the food.”

The company was out of touch with its “ultimate customers”. And there can be a disconnect between church members and church leaders. How much the church members and leaders together live the purpose of the church—that’s the test of integrity and health of a congregation.

Why would you—why would anyone--want to make disciples of Jesus, and mentor others toward reproductive maturity of gifts and ministry? I’ll tell you why **I** want to do it. In fact, I’ll give you the “top 10 reasons I want to make disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus,” which is my shorthand for Mission One.

Reason number 10: The Bible tells me so. For some people, that would be near the top of their list of reasons for making disciples. Texts like Matthew 28:18-20, and Ephesians 4:11-16 instruct us (in the words of Jesus and the words of Paul) what ministry looks like. But for me, this comes through like a big “should”. I don’t want a lot of “shoulds” in my life. More and more, I’m trying to move away from “you shoulds” that come from outside of me, to “I wants”, which come from deep within, as Christ is formed in me.

Reason number 9: I want to achieve significance, not just success. I want to leave my mark (a living legacy) that honors God above all. I don’t know how many years I have left—none of us does. I want all my years to count.

Reason number 8: I want to grow in spiritual wisdom and skill with the spiritual gifts, personality, passions, experience and character God has given me so far, to fulfill my particular purpose, or ministry. Our APC 301 class is designed to help us do that. The next one starts soon—probably the first Sunday of February, because of all our January special events. Have you taken “301” yet? APC 301 will help you “strengthen your serve”, as Chuck Swindoll says. And you’ll know what to concentrate on, and what to leave behind so you can enjoy more flow of the Spirit of God in your life.

Reason number 7: I want to prove that “real men love Jesus”, and defeat the lie that “loving God is for females”. Isn’t that how it goes in our culture? Most churches are 2 to 1, women to men. Yet men, the Bible tells us, are to be the spiritual leaders of their families. I see a big “disconnect” there. Real men love Jesus! Get used to it!

Reason number 6: I want the thrill of seeing the Kingdom of God develop in others. I have had that experience a few times. Counting Grace Michel, there are seven people I have encouraged in faith who are now in full-time Christian work, and there are others who have a Christ-centered outlook on their vocations, families, and communities. It’s tremendously rewarding to know I have had a part in that.

Reason number 5: I want the fellowship of people committed to the same vision. I love being part of a team that pulls together. For example, I am very grateful that we have brought Preston on staff to help us in these early critical months of Act Two. I rejoice that he is doing things I cannot do because I am only one person. I cheer that he and I can discuss, challenge each other, and plan to create success—because we are working for the same thing.

Reason number 4: I want to join God in what God is doing. One side benefit of this is the opportunity to better integrate both “relationship” and “task”, which has always been a challenge for me.

Reason number 3: I want a relationship with a (younger) person so I can help “raise” them with more purpose and success than I could with my own family. I know parenting is hard, and often there’s no support. We are young when we have our first kids, and none of them comes with an “instruction manual”. So we make mistakes. Kids learn how to push our buttons. If we are really lucky, our kids get to a point where they forgive us (since we were doing the best we knew how), and we become more equal, like peers. They ask our advice, and now they really listen! Well, there are probably a lot of things we wish we could “do over”. And when we take on a younger person—in years, or in faith—we have that chance to “do over”—and do better—the kind of mentoring we know younger ones need. This is especially true for men. Younger men need the blessing of older men who know them and value them. There is a huge “father hunger” out there, because our fathers did not know how to give us the blessing that takes root in our hearts, and grounds us and give us solid courage in a world of change.

Reason number 2: God has called me—given me these desires—and I want more of God. Now, you may hear that as so unique to me as a pastor that this would never appear on your top 10 list. But I have to tell you, I never felt or heard a call to ministry like some people get. There was no voice coming from the clouds, no tortured solitary retreat where I got some sign that I should become a pastor. No, I just saw that I had gifts that fit the things pastors do, and I had seen God do some pretty neat things in a church, so maybe God might use me to do things like that with some other church. That’s pretty weak.

I tell you this to say, we are all called to ministry. Your baptism was your call to ministry; it was your ordination. You are the agent, the ambassador of God to people whose lives only you can touch, because of your proximity, your personal relationship, your particular gifts and talents and personality. My job as a pastor, I’ve come to see, is to do what Ephesians 4 says—to prepare YOU for works of ministry. I’m to run a training center, not a hospital. “Health”, for Christians, looks like ministry—discipling people who disciple other people. You are called to ministry.

And reason number 1, the most powerful reason for my wanting (and perhaps, your wanting) to disciple people who disciple people is . . . I want to feel God’s pleasure. I want to hear him saying to me, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

What are your top reasons for wanting to make disciples who make disciples? How do we love God? We do what he says—not out of fear, but out of love. We live to make Him proud of us. We apply His commands to everything we do. For example, we could just go to the grocery store as usual. But if we want to make God proud of us, we look for the lonely person, the short person needing something off the top shelf, or we engage someone with their hand in the same bin of carrots, and we start a conversation about how they cook their carrots. If the conversation goes somewhere, perhaps that is the start of something God can really enjoy. See, even in our household maintenance tasks, we are loving God and loving neighbor.

Two weeks ago, Grace Michel stood here and opened God’s Word. But even as she spoke, couldn’t you feel the joy of loving God just pour out of her? AS SHE WAS PREACHING, she was loving God and loving us. And she is taking that love for God and people to Peru.

Will we take it to Auburn? Will you make God's love real in Auburn, this year?

It's time now to move from hearing the call of God through the written and spoken Word, to doing something about it—responding to this call of God. We do it through renewing our baptism promises at the start of this New Year.

We have TWO fonts this morning, with some of our Elders ready to pour water on your hands as a tactile reminder of your baptism. They will speak God's call to you, and to give you a clear marble—that looks remarkably like a drop of water—to remind you of your act of dedication for 2008. Ushers will assist the flow from row to row, so people don't have to stand in the aisles very long. All who are baptized in Christ are welcome here, to claim the year ahead for Christ. Then our final song, the blessing, and our healing ministry. Will our Elders join me at the fonts, and ushers take your places with our people? . . . Come to Jesus, and claim the year ahead “to passionately love Him, and radiate that love to every individual.”

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on January 13, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]