

WGUMC January 27, 2019 “Jesus’ Mission Statement”  
Luke 4:14-21

Whenever someone starts to talk about mission statements, I can see eyes start to roll. And for good reason. Someone once defined a mission statement as a “long, awkward sentence that demonstrates management’s inability to think clearly.”

Organizations often hire consultants to write them, but there is a website that will quickly generate a mission statement for you. Rather than taking the time to gather a committee and pay a lot of money to come up with meaningless gibberish, you can just click and it will pull from a database of corporate-sounding speech, randomly select nouns and verbs and put them into a meaningless sentence for you for free.

Mission statements don’t always capture the true mission of the organization. One internet jokester said that if corporations were honest, their mission statements might sound something like this: “To see how far we can get with this sort of business before it

becomes illegal.” Or “To get enough dorks to buy our stupid products that we can afford to dress as cool as we know we are.”

Now I’m not trying to say that all mission statements are meaningless or that those who write them are dishonest. I wouldn’t want to say that because in our Gospel reading today, Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth to read his mission statement.

One of the ways we know this is his mission statement is because the Holy Spirit was there to certify it. Remember how, at Jesus’ baptism, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove? That same Spirit then drove him out into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Well, the Spirit didn’t just leave him out there. The Spirit brought him back or, you could say, Jesus brought the Spirit back. As our reading begins, Jesus is filled with the power of the Spirit when he returns to Galilee, to his home country. In the power of that Spirit, he starts teaching, and people start listening.

When Jesus comes to the synagogue in Nazareth, someone hands him the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. And it becomes obvious

to all within earshot that the words he is reading is the reality that he is living. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me...”

Have you ever seen someone who is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit? It is a sight to behold. You can sense it. I don’t know how, but you can know it. The Bible says that King David was anointed by the Spirit. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were, too. So when Jesus says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” he is very publicly joining the ranks of the great prophets. He is taking up their mantle and signing on to their mission.

His words are very old. Isaiah said them long ago, but when Jesus says them, he puts new flesh on them. “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” It isn’t just a prophecy anymore. It isn’t just a promise. It is a real live person and he’s right there in front of them.

The Holy Spirit gives Jesus divine authorization. What follows is his divine direction: The Spirit has anointed him “to bring good news

to the poor.” The people in Galilee are poor, and Jesus must be very good news because everyone has been singing his praises.

If you want to know what he is teaching, you’ll find his lesson plan laid out in the Sermon on the Mount. The very first thing that we read in Luke’s version of that sermon is this: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” So you see, it all lines up. What he is reading is what he is teaching is what he is living. Sounds like a mission statement to me.

But he is not only bringing good news to the poor, he is proclaiming release to the captives. I was at a Just Faith presentation at Los Altos UMC a week ago. Jack Jezreel was walking us through this passage in Luke and told us something I had never heard before. When Jesus talks about “captives,” he’s talking about farmers who have been pushed off their land because they can’t afford to pay taxes to the Romans. Eventually, they have to sell themselves into slavery to pay off their debts. Maybe that’s why the

Romans eye Jesus so suspiciously. He is coming to release the captives and let the oppressed go free.

Small farmers, government workers, and ordinary people like you and me caught up in the global economy can relate to these captives and their longing to be free. But our captivity is not just political. Our bondage is not just financial. We can be chained to our jobs, enslaved to our families, imprisoned by physical pain, manacled by mental illness, and detained in the dungeon of spiritual despair. Have you ever been there? Hang on a little longer. Jesus is coming to release you.

Jesus wants you to be free, but first he wants you to be able to see. So he is on a mission to help you recover your sight. As you know, Jesus opened the eyes of the blind many times. But even more important, he opened the eyes of the heart. Too often, we have cataracts on our hearts and can't see the truth of the situation we are in and Jesus is here to remove them.

Hank and I just watched the Spike Lee film, *The Black Klansman* this weekend. It's based on the true story of an African American police officer in Colorado Springs who managed to infiltrate the KKK in 1978. To listen to the actor playing the young David Duke talk, to listen to the Klansmen plot, and then at the end of the film to watch a clip of angry men in Charlottesville chant and march is to realize how much spiritual blindness there still is among us. What are we not seeing not just in other people's hearts but in our own?

Deb St. Julien from Almaden Hills is active in SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice) which is a program at Sacred Heart Community Services. She came to the JYM pastors offering to organize a "waking up to your own bias" discussion group sometime this year and it looks like that will happen in Lent. Even though it seems that we are more divided along racial lines now than ever, it's never too late to pray, "Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me; place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free."

Good news to the poor; release to the captives; recovery of sight to the blind; freedom for the oppressed. This is not a file it and forget it kind of mission statement. This isn't something Jesus put on a PowerPoint or stuck on a webpage somewhere and then never went back to it. In Matthew's Gospel, John the Baptist brings Jesus back to it. He sent his own disciples to Jesus to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" And Jesus answers him by saying, in effect, check out my mission statement. He says, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."

[Matthew 11:2-6]

How do we know that Jesus is the Messiah? Because he is doing what the Messiah is supposed to do. Jesus gives us the metrics. His mission can be measured. It can be proved or disproved by what we hear and see.

The same is true for the followers of Jesus. The mission of the United Methodist Church is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Our General Conference meets in February and, God help us, the world will get to hear and see whether we are living up to it.

Here at Willow Glen, we’re not going to get much media attention, but we still have a mission. We aim to be “God’s family growing in caring, sharing and serving.” So, if someone came to us and said, “Is this the church I want to be a part of or should I look for another? Are you the people I want to belong to or should I look someplace else?” could we say, with confidence, “What do you hear and see?” Would they see God’s family growing? Would they see us caring, sharing and serving? Our Vision Team has put together a survey and over the next couple of months, you’ll have a chance to answer those questions.

But let me leave you with this question: What is your personal mission statement and how does it align with Jesus? When I think

about my mission statement, I think about Jesus bringing good news to the poor, and I'm always wondering how I can do that. It just so happens that in a week and a half, the poor are coming to our door. For the next month, my mission statement will be to bring good news to the women of Village House and to share their good news with you. The reason that I volunteer, the reason I take a shift in the middle of the night, is because of Jesus. He gave up his life; I figure that I can give up some sleep.

I don't know your personal mission statement, but I do know this about you. Somehow, somewhere, sometime in this next week, God is going to bring the poor to your door. On the door of your heart, someone in need is going to knock. That someone may be poor in spirit or poor in health. They may lack resources other than wealth. You may hear them knocking and wish you could hide. Or you might be thinking, "Me too!" And that may well be true. You may be feeling poorly yourself. But that doesn't change the fact that God has chosen you. As a follower of Jesus, it is still your job to

bring the good news. I'd go even farther than that. I'd say that your job is to BE someone's good news. So even if you don't think you have anything left to give, you're still here and you have a Jesus-shaped life to live. By God's grace, you are the good news. And I fully expect that I will hear and see that blessing coming back to you.