

What is the Church to do?

- I. **What we expect the Church to do**
- II. **What God assigns the Church to do**

Our summer sermon series is focusing on the Church, our Mission and the Ministry. The purpose of this sermon series is to remind us that the Church is not about the building. Our new building is important... there is no doubt about that. How many folks would be comfortable walking into a storefront that has a giant "For Rent" sign in the front window? It is important for us to remember that the Church is not a building, but people. The Church is all believers who trust in Christ Jesus as their Savior from sin. We can find the Church where people are gathered around the gospel; the good news of Jesus. The gospel is found in the Word of God (the Bible) and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper). The gospel in Word and Sacrament is the only thing that will strengthen our faith and build God's Church. We also learned from Scripture the importance of doctrine in the Church... how important it is to feed ourselves with only the truth of God's Word. Last Sunday, the Holy Spirit encouraged us to stay in the Word, with faithful study and worship attendance.

Now, I do apologize for boring you with the fundamentals. I'm sure that you want to get on to the action part of Church, Mission and Ministry. What are we to do as the Church? It's important for us to ask that question as we transition to 377 East Lincoln Trail Blvd. We will have a new building, a new identity in the community, a new church logo. But what are we supposed to do as the Church?

It depends on who you talk to. If you ask teenagers they will tell you that the church should have an active youth group with lots of fun activities. If you ask 20somethings, they might tell you that the church should have a praise band, like the concert we had here on Thursday evening, or a singles group. Ask a mother of three in her thirties, what would she say? The church should have a playground, a mommies' day out, a preschool, a day care, a Christian day school... all paid for by the church. What would a 40-year-old parent say who is frightened to death that their faithful years of parenting will go down the drain when their child starts hanging out with the wrong crowd in high school? It's not uncommon to hear them say, "We need to have something for the teens!" What about 50, 60, 70, 80 year olds? What would they say is the function of the church?

The fact is, if we approach church this way, then we have gone the way of the "Consumerism Church." If I need this, I will go to church. They will take care of it. My infant child needs to be baptized. I will go to church. My child needs to be educated, I will go to church. My child needs to take catechism classes, go to church. I need to get married. I need to bury my dead parent. Church has that. I need a variety of activities at least 3-4 times a week. If the church doesn't have that, I will go someplace else.

A lot of churches have picked up on this, how they "do church." And they advertise themselves that way. "We aren't like other churches. Our playground is bigger. Our sanctuary has stadium seating. We give meals to the hungry and have a clothing closet for the needy. We send 1000s of care packages to deployed Soldiers. We purchase toys for the kiddos at Christmas. You don't like the liturgy? We'll throw it out. You don't like us talking about sin? Then we won't. What do you want church to be? Tell us! We'll make it happen!" Often what happens is that the way people go around selecting churches is based on their programs and has nothing to do with what they believe or teach. The temptation then is that we start thinking that church is all about the programs, the social church. Church is what we expect the church to do and be.

Since the Church is God's people, all believers in Christ Jesus, then the question we need to ask is, "What does God expect the church to do?" or better yet, "What does God assign the church to do?" In our lesson this morning from Mark 16 Jesus said, "**Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.**" It's so simple, yet sinful human beings have made into something so complex. "Go and preach the gospel." The Church is to show people Jesus. Jesus gave the Church such a simple task so that every member of his Church can do it. Show the world Jesus.

We have a beautiful tool to carry this out in our liturgy. You can use the creed (our statement of belief) as your outline... Show the world that Jesus Christ *was conceived by Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary*. Jesus was holy and perfect; God's Son and the Son of Mary. Jesus was man so he would be required to live under God's law. Jesus was true God so he might fulfill the law, to live his life according to it with perfection. Jesus was man so he could die, and yet true God so his death has value for all people. *He was crucified, died and was buried*. He died to save the world from their sins. He descended into hell. After his death he made a trip to hell. He paraded through its streets, and proclaimed his victory over sin and Satan. *On the third day he rose again from the dead*. He proved his victory over sin and death by raising his dead corpse from his tomb. *He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty*. There Jesus speaks to the Father on our behalf. There in heaven he rules over the nations. He directs the affairs of the world to benefit his Church. *He will come again to judge the living and the dead*. Jesus will come again to bring us who believe in him home to heaven where we will live with him eternally.

This is what God has assigned the Church to do: show people Jesus.

"Go and preach the good news" includes administering the Sacraments. The Sacraments are, after all, visible gospel. As the Church we are to baptize; apply water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There we see the gospel. In baptism God promises that this washing works rebirth and renewal, (Titus 3:5), that it saves (1Peter 3:21), that it forgives sins (Acts 2:38-39). Holy communion is visible gospel – Jesus told us to take this bread and eat it for the forgiveness of your sins, to take this wine and drink it for the forgiveness of your sins... for there with the bread and Christ's body and blood are also truly present. Preaching the gospel also means administering the sacraments according to Christ's institution and direction. This is what God has assigned the Church to do: show people Jesus through the Sacraments.

Why does God assign us this task? For what purpose? Jesus said, "**Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Those who do not believe will be condemned.**" (Mark 16:16)

If you've been reading the editorials in the newspaper and your friends' Facebook posts and the internet blogs many people believe Casey Anthony deserves a guilty verdict. Folks feel the same with our own local murder case regarding Brent Burke. But before we're too quick to point the finger and shake our heads at them, God turns around and proclaims, "This is also what you deserve." He only needs to point out the clear evidence against us; the greed of our heart, the lust of our eyes, the fires begun by our loose lips, our pride and self-righteousness... makes us all guilty.

Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments administered by the Church, God shows us Jesus. For the Father declared his Son guilty instead of you. The Son took your punishment. The innocent one goes to die for guilty sinners. Because of his Son Jesus, God has declared you 'not guilty.' By his grace (love we don't deserve), he allowed the gospel in Word and Sacrament to work on your heart and create faith in you. And through faith you have received God's verdict. You are not guilty through faith in Christ Jesus. You believe because of the gospel. Because you believe, you have been saved from your sins, you have been saved from Satan's accusations, from hell, saved from your grave, saved for all eternity in heaven. "**Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.**" is Jesus' promise to you.

This is what God has assigned the Church to do. That's why we have made it our mission, "It is our mission to seek the unchurched, strive for spiritual growth, strengthen one another through the Word of God and His Sacraments."

Why is it so important to know this? It will have an impact on how we do ministry in our new building. With a new building come many opportunities for new and exciting programs as well as the opportunity to enhance the level of service of existing programs. What we must remember is that we will strive to bring all the activities of our congregation into the support of spreading the Gospel. There are very obvious and direct ways we do that already. Worship, Sunday School and Bible classes, catechism instruction are all obvious ways that happens. But that doesn't mean that we can't think outside the box (to borrow an already trite phrase). The WELS connection that we watch every first Sunday of the month in church is a great source of ideas. For example, we have an exploding Hispanic population in our country. Some congregations are setting up ESL program, "English as a Second Language." These congregations are teaching Hispanics to speak English. ESL is a program, a social program, and meets a community need.

Yet what the congregations do when they teach ESL is use basic Bible stories as their textbooks. That's preaching the Gospel *and* meeting a community need. Another example is of a pastor in Wisconsin who sets up a booth at their community's annual bridal show. Setting up a booth at a wedding fair is certainly a program that meets a social need. But in welcoming the couples into a five week session of pre-marital counseling, the pastor has the opportunity to preach the Gospel, show them Jesus, what he's done for their souls, and how his love is the foundation of the marriage and life to come.

If you've been reading the announcements in the bulletin and the monthly newsletter, you know that you have an opportunity to share your ideas and dream big for the future of Faith Lutheran Church. We have an endless amount of opportunities lying before us to share the gospel to the people of this community. Our vicar, Troy Schreiner, is gathering information from the members of our community to determine what needs we can meet as a congregation, and by meeting those needs to carry out the most important work of sharing the gospel. I look forward to discovering those opportunities and together with you putting them into practice so that we join together in carrying out the one assignment that God has given his Church: to preach the Gospel to all nations. Amen.