

Pre-Assembly Bible Study

The Shaping of Mission

2003 Festival Assembly

Preparing Heart and Mind

This year's Synod Assembly is a festival event that is designed to equip and motivate. Items of a "business" nature are being confined to a single session. The majority of our time together will be focused on understanding the nature of our mission from God and on equipping ourselves with the skills for mission. Our keynote speaker will assist us in our understandings; our shapeshop leaders will provide us with skills. To maximize your appreciation for all that will be shared, you are urged to gather with others of the congregation and engage in this three-session Bible study. Your time in reflection will be well-spent, for the Bible study is intended to have you begin thinking about the three great missional questions that will be at the heart of our time together in assembly.

Clay in the Potter's Hand

Clay. Spinning wheel. Water. Loving hands. A potter is guided by a vision and a purpose. The clay is carefully centered on the spinning wheel. It is worked gently and persistently; it is wetted to keep it fresh and pliable. It is gifted with color, texture, and shape to help it fulfill its intended purpose. And it is hardened as it is being prepared to be placed into service.

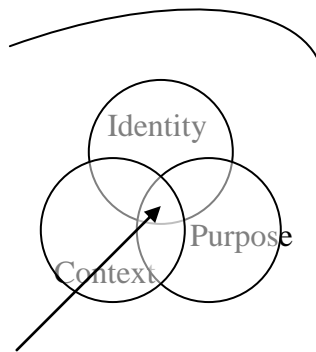
So, says Jeremiah, are we in the potter's hand.

In the coming Synod Assembly we will again feel the spinning sensation of change and the touch of the Master Potter. We will feel something new starting to emerge. And we will know that we are being remade for service to a new day and time. How might God be shaping your congregation for mission?



A Model for Thinking about Mission

God's Vision for Us



Mission

Deeply Rooted in the Spirit

To know your *mission* is to know your purpose and calling. But how do we discover what our true mission is? How does a congregation identify the “main thing” that God is asking of them? The diagram at left suggests a way to begin to zero in on an answer.

Discovering your mission as a congregation begins with an exploration into what God's vision is for the mission of the whole Church on earth. Scripture and study into the history and tradition of the church can help us see God's vision. Then, grounding ourselves in prayer and reflection both privately and corporately, we can stay fixed on what God is saying to us.

It is in the context of our listening to God's vision for the Church on earth, that we can then ask the specific questions about our congregation's mission. We will ask about our congregation's identity, purpose, and context:

Who Are We?

- As People of God's creating?
- As Lutheran Christians?
- As a congregation set in this community?

Identity

Why Are We Here?

- What does Scripture tell us?
- Where does prayer and reflection lead us?
- How are we different from other organizations?

Purpose

Who is our Neighbor?

- Within the congregation?
- Within the community?
- Within the wider church and world?

Context

Mission – what we are to do -- is discovered at the intersection of these three. For something to truly be a part of the congregation's mission it must “fit” all three.

So, then, you might say something is **not** a part of our mission if:

It is part of our identity (e.g. German heritage), but not necessary to our purpose or context.
Or it is part of our greater purpose (e.g. caring for children), but not needed in our context.
Or it is needed in our context (e.g. more retail stores), but does not fit our identity or purpose.

Session One: Who Are We?

Read Acts 2:1-4, 40-47

WE ARE

A Letter...The Body...The Branches...A Royal Priesthood...Vessels...Children of God
Baptized...Beloved...Forgiven...Gifted...Called...Holy...Gathered...Sustained...Enlightened
Witnesses...Ambassadors...Peacemakers...Heralds...Teachers...“Little Christs”

Reading Scripture

When the day of Pentecost arrived, all the believers were gathered together as a strong wind and tongues of fire appeared. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages. Many believed Peter’s message that day and were baptized; about three thousand people. They spent their time learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers. Many miracles and wonders were done through the apostles, which caused everyone to be filled with awe. Everyday they continued to meet as a group in the temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating the food with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved. (Acts 2: 1-4, 40-47 paraphrased).



Asking Questions

How did the early Christians think of themselves? What made them bold?

How did “who” they are affect what they said and did?

How are “being” and “doing” connected in your experience?

What is the chief part of the identity of your congregation?

Food for Thought

Often being a disciple is thought of as subscribing to a set of beliefs or following a set of behaviors and practices. But being a disciple might more accurately be thought of as having entered into *a way of being that then results in a way of doing*. Discipleship is becoming a new self or a different self because one’s whole orientation to the world has changed. How one views

people, purpose, future, urgency, values, and commitment changes. The disciple is a person with a new vision; he or she is a new creation. The power of the Good News, Holy Spirit, and community life in the experience of the early Christians made them natural and urgent witnesses to the good things they had discovered.

- Witnessing is highly relational; it is one person sharing with another – friend to friend, parent to child and child to parent, worker to co-worker.
- Witnessing is highly reflective; it is conversation about the transformation that occurs in one's worldview, values, and commitments because of Jesus.
- Witnessing is highly immediate; it is dialog about the experience of life and conviction in that moment; it is sharing one's own spiritual journey.
- Witnessing is highly incarnational; it is allowing the encounter with Jesus to happen for another through you.

Witnessing is a mentoring activity in which there is freedom to explore, question, and share. It accepts people where they are, but it also seeks to help people take a next step in their spiritual life. Witnessing is a teaching activity which should not be confused with what happens in the worship hour, for worship is about adoration. To limit one's spiritual feeding to adoration (worship) without coupling it with learning (discipling) is to miss the opportunity to have balance in one's growth as a disciple and a witness for Christ.

Who, Then, Are We?

- As People of God's creating?
- As Lutheran Christians?
- As a congregation set in this community?

Identity

Prayer

O God, we are children of your presence and your promises. We are shaped by your love and filled with your grace. Make of us what you will, that we may be your People in this world, bearing witness to your goodness and salvation. May those around us be touched by your Holy Spirit because of our words and deeds, for the sake of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Session Two: Why Are We Here?

Read Acts 4:1-22

WE ARE

To Go...Baptize...Teach...Proclaim...Announce...Make Disciples
Stewards...Lights...Mustard Seeds...Salt...Leaven...New Wine
Sent...Given...Blessed...Chosen...Shared

Reading Scripture

*Peter and John were in the temple in Jerusalem speaking to the people. The religious leaders became annoyed that they were preaching in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And so they arrested them. But many who had heard them speak believed, about five thousand. The next day as the elders and scribes examined them, Peter and John—who were common uneducated men—spoke with boldness so that the elders of the temple wanted to prohibit them from speaking further. But Peter and John declared, “**We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.**” And seeing they had no case to press against them, the elders let them go (Acts 4 paraphrased).*



Asking Questions

- What purpose filled Peter and John's life? How did they come to know that purpose?
- What is God's purpose for the whole Church on earth?
- What can prevent us from fulfilling our purpose in Christ?
- What is the chief purpose that your congregation is living out?

Food for Thought

It's not hard to hear the central theme here – that the disciples understood themselves as *message-bearers* who had been given the Spirit, power, reassurance, and authority to carry out a mission. It is good to know one's purpose! It likely helped the disciples cope with Jesus' departure and all the fear and confusion that swirled around them after the crucifixion. The disciples found a boldness coming from outside of themselves to proclaim Good News, to teach

for obedience, and to be a witness. In the disciples' day, as in ours, the message is intended to address the deep spiritual needs that people experience. And those needs may change over time. In New Testament times the great spiritual question may have been, "Who is this Jesus?" In Reformation times the question may have been "What must I do to be saved?" Both questions are especially well addressed by considering Jesus' death. In more recent times the question gets expressed in various ways: "What must I do to be happy?" "Am I loved?" "Am I safe?" "What is the meaning of this life?" Such questions are especially well addressed by considering Jesus' life. To bear witness is to carry the message of Jesus into the conversations that happen all around us about all these questions.

Why, Then, Are We Here?

- What does Scripture tell us?
- Where do prayer and reflection lead us?
- How are we different from other organizations?
- What is our congregation's singular, most important purpose?

Purpose

Prayer

O Lord, help us find our "voice" within today's world. As people who have seen and heard great things, help us to speak of what we know. Preserve us from being the kind of religious establishment that gets in the way of its own message. By your Holy Spirit make the message of salvation find freedom of expression and freshness of style so that all people can hear the proclamation of Good News "in their own language." Amen.

Session Three: Who is Our Neighbor?

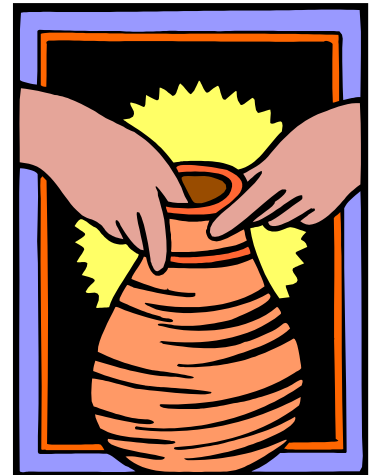
Read Acts 1:6-14

THEY ARE

Christ's Sheep...The Lost...Sojourners...Samaritans...All People
Son...Friend...Daughter...Spouse...Coworker...Stranger
Those for Whom Christ Aches...Weeps...Reaches...Touches...Dies...Finds

Reading Scripture

The Book of Acts records the earliest steps in the spread of Christianity from the central point of Jerusalem outward like radiated light into the lands beyond. "And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). How comfortable to think that the proclamation begins at home (we do, after all, refer to our "home church" when we speak.) But how uncomfortable to be told that the proclamation must be taken to those we consider so unlike us, those not a part of our culture and values, those we otherwise avoid because they are "unclean" (our modern day "Samaritans"). If we could but stay at home with our proclamation, we could nestle into a preoccupation with doing the practices and rituals of the church. When we are asked to take the message beyond home, we are being asked to risk and to change. Yet it is our duty and delight "as each has received a gift, (to) employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10).



Asking Questions

Why did early Christians have a controversy over preaching to the Gentiles and circumcision?

Who are the foreigners, the unclean, the Samaritans of our time?

Do we exist for the sake of our members or for the sake of those who are not members?

Who are the neighbors of your congregation?

Food for Thought

What would your congregation look like if it transformed itself for the sake of the "neighbor." What if we really were a missionary people? What would happen if the Priesthood

of All Believers really took itself completely seriously? How would we change our modes of work in order to be focused on mission? What would it feel like if your congregation was not distracted by doing its tasks and business but was caught up in a spirit of joy and anticipation about the future? Do we realize that if we want to make deep and lasting change, it will only happen after a long time of careful, prayerful, intentional work that keeps *mission* as the “number one” objective? Sometimes, to bring about change, you need to just start behaving differently, even before you know exactly what it is you are trying to become. You need to dare to BE what you are BECOMING. In the book, Good to Great, the authors maintain that U.S. businesses that have really taken off have been radically single-minded, vision and purpose-driven, and guided by the right leadership in the right places. Here are some great questions to ask of your congregation’s life and work:

- Does your budget reflect your priorities? Does it support mission or maintenance first of all?
- Are you working from a model of scarcity or a model of abundance as you pursue your ministry?
- If your congregation was not doing a particular task or ministry would you start it?
- If you were doing a particular task or ministry and stopped, would you miss it?
- What is central and what is peripheral to mission? Can you give the first, best energy to the central?
- Are you doing the same things over and over again but expecting different results?
- Are you willing to give up even treasured things in order that the church and its mission can live?
- What would it look like if the pastor did not spend time putting out fires, only lighting fires?
- What is God dreaming for your mission and ministry?

Who, Then, is our Neighbor?

- Within the congregation?
- Within the community?
- Within the wider church and world?

Context

Prayer

O God, bring to our minds and hearts the conviction that our lives are not about we ourselves, but about you and the Kingdom that you are drawing together. May we see beyond our own experience, and experience instead the saving work you are doing through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord among all the peoples of the earth. Amen.