

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

**** Luke 14: 12 – 14**

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

**** (blank)** I truly appreciate the kind feedback that I've been receiving regarding this Fall's series of messages as we have been revisiting our Church's mission statement. To repeat what I said a number of weeks ago in introducing this series, I really believe that it is important to stop and look at the bigger picture on a regular basis. As the pressures of the world are constantly calling us to go 'this way' and 'that way', my prayer is that these messages will help us all to think about whatever course adjustments, recommitments, and so forth that may be necessary to be the people and the church that God has called us to be.

Now, having said that, I know that you know that there is still a definite agenda to this series other than a simple reminder. The series will culminate on "Christ the King" Sunday (November 23/24) with the consecration of our "Personal Covenants With God". These Covenants are the main way that we 'issue a call to discipleship' in this church, and we have been doing this for the past 10 years.

There are already a couple other churches in our Annual Conference that are now doing a similar Covenant program (they got it from us), and as our District Superintendent asked me to lead a class on how and why we do this at our District Day of Learning next January, the odds are that there will be many other churches who will follow our lead next Fall.

For those of you who are not familiar with these Covenants, please let me share just a short word about them, and to let you know about one (hopefully) significant change we are making in this process this year.

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

The Covenant process is very simple. It is based on the high level of trust that we (i.e. the Pastors, staff, and lay leaders of FUMC) have in you. What I mean by that is that we know that you have chosen to be here - as opposed to any other church, or *no* church). We believe too, that while there are people in this congregation who are not totally convinced - yet - about their faith (and you folk are highly valued and welcomed here!) at the same time, our members and regular attenders are here because you have heard the call of Jesus Christ in your life, and your heart's desire is to follow him. Why else would you be here?

So, we take a series of messages each Fall, and talk specifically about things that we refer to 'piecemeal' in messages throughout the rest of the year - i.e., what a disciple 'looks like'. What is involved in being a disciple?

You see, the Bible - Jesus - is very clear in telling all who would listen, that following him is a decision that affects everything in our lives - our time, our worship, our money, our service, the way we respond to life's events (especially when life doesn't go the way we would expect, or like!), and more.

The root word for disciple is the same as the word 'discipline', and truly, it takes self-discipline to be a disciple of Jesus. The whole point of 'following' is that, if you follow someone, you no longer make the 'rules' for your own lives, but we align ourselves with the leading of the Holy Spirit in the long process of being shaped, formed, transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

So, in these messages this year we've talked about the importance of Community, what does it mean to be a 'Community of Faith', the importance of our giving, and how being 'committed' changes us, how that effects everything that we are. Today we're focusing on our service to a broken and hurting world, and next week, we're going to wrap it up by talking about the impact of being committed to sharing Christ's love in *words* (what impact would that have in our plan for growing as a disciple?)

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

But **that** word... *plan*... is what our Covenants are about. These things are too important to be left to chance, or to the whim of a moment. One of my bedrock life quotes comes from business, not the Bible, but I think it really is a Biblical thought:

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Those who fail to plan, plan to fail!

If we are serious about following Jesus (as I believe we all are), then we should have a ability and a willingness to put into words just what it is that we expect to do about that commitment in the coming year. If we can't specify what it means for us to be a follower of Jesus in areas that are Biblically significant, then, maybe we really aren't the disciples that we think we are.

And, maybe your plan is pretty much the same as last year's and the year before that - (you're thinking, "hey, I keep writing the same thing, what's the point?") listen, if it's a good plan, and you are growing in your maturity, and faith, then, great! Keep doing it! It's no less important to recommit if that's the case.

** So, these covenants are printed 'forms' that give you the opportunity to prayerfully be specific about your intention to follow Christ in 2014. I say this every year, and still, I find that many people don't 'get' this part - please listen: WE DO NOT READ YOUR COVENANT! This isn't a pledge drive, even though one line is about your giving, we're not going to have any totals, or goals. This is about you and God in this church. You keep one copy, and seal the other in a self-addressed envelope, which we're asking you to bring to a worship service on the 23 or 24th, and we will consecrate them to God by bringing them forward, and then we'll join in a prayer together. We'll keep them in a secure place, and mail them back to you in about 6 months.

Again, because we trust you, we are convinced that when you lay that covenant on the altar, you will *mean what you have written*. And so you will do your best to follow it - because it is your *own* spiritual plan for the coming year.

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

One significant change we're making this year is in response to those who have said that you wished you had more time to think about these, or more time to write them down than we've been giving you. So we will give you *some* time to write in the services on the 24th, but this year, we will be mailing the Covenant forms ahead of time to everyone on our mailing list. We'll be sending them out this Friday (Nov 15), so you should all have them in plenty of time to prepare for the services the next weekend. We'll also have some extras available for those who didn't get one in the mail, or who forgot them.

So, that's our plan, that's where's we're going. To me, Covenant Day is the most important day of the year for us as a church. We will celebrate Christmas and Easter, of course, and Pentecost, etc., these are high days in what they point to, but the significance of those days for this church is framed by the level of our commitment to Christ - and that's what these are all about. Easter and Christmas and all the sundays in between take on a deeper, richer, meaning for those who are truly committed.

You fulfilling your covenant is the foundation of our church, it really is. So, I'm asking you - *please* pray for God to lead in your response to your covenant, and all you prayer warriors out there - please start praying for this whole process as a congregation, that God would be honored, and we will grow together in The Lord.

** One of the doctrinal distinctives of John Wesley, who is the Spiritual father of all Methodists (and, by the way, this idea of covenanting goes right to the heart of who we are as "Methodists", which is obvious when you think of our name. John and Charles Wesley formed groups as young men which they called "Holy Clubs." Others, seeing how carefully they structured their lives, mockingly called them "Methodists". Why? Because they were so methodical in their walk with God! They heard the jeers, but their response was, "Hey, that's better than Holy Club, so, we'll take it!" So, we stand in the main stream of a great tradition as we demonstrate our methodical response to what is the most important thing in our lives, too!)

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

Anyway, one of the doctrinal main points of Wesley's theology is the doctrine of Holiness. Holiness comes from the same biblical word as we were talking about last Sunday on All Saints Day - *hagios*. I heard there was some confusion about this last week, so let me say this as plainly as I can: one of the Biblical words for the Christians, the people in any given church is *hagios*, which means, the 'holy ones' or 'the saints'. Just one example: Ephesians 1:1

**** "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus..."**

He says the same thing about the church members in Corinth, in Philippi, and on and on... they are the church people. Imperfect, under construction, *regular* people filled with the Holy Spirit. So, regardless with what people have done in our human traditions, in the Bible the 'saints' are you and me, if we are believers in Christ. God 'sees us' as the holy ones, because in Christ, we are forgiven.

But we are also called to *become* what God sees us as being. So, we are the 'holy ones/ saints' in the sense that we are forgiven, and set apart from the world as the people of God, but at the same time, we are '*becoming* holy' in our conduct, lives, minds, etc. That's the process of 'sanctification' (becoming holy.) It's what our covenants address.

None of us are there, yet, totally. But we are in process. And for John Wesley, holiness was not simply about being personally pious (i.e., being someone who prays, studies Scripture, worships, gives alms, and behaves in a manner that pleases Jesus). That was part of holiness, to be sure, but Wesley made a statement on many occasions that he truly lived out in his life every day, and which also shapes every United Methodist congregation that is serious about who we are.

**** "There is no holiness without social holiness..."**

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

What he meant by that, is simply, we are not fulfilling the call of God in our lives, if we are not impacting the world with God's love. Holiness is meant to be lived, not just internally, but *in the real world*. We have attempted to include that aspect of our holiness in our Mission Statement, which says that we are *committed to sharing the love of Jesus Christ with a hurting world...*

I have noticed that there are two basic ways that people respond to the evil and 'terribleness' that takes place every day in our world. So, I hear people get angry, and rant about 'those awful people'. (And listen, I get it - there is evil in this world that makes me angry, too. Crimes against children, the neglect of the elderly, people who abuse their positions in government to line their pockets, or even worse, in the church... It should make us angry.) But as I reflect on Jesus' response to the evil in his day, evil which often affected him, too, I see that his response varied. He was capable of turning over the money changer's tables in the temple, and to speak sharply and bluntly to people; but he also wept for the people of Jerusalem as he entered the city, and these were the very people who were going to have him crucified within a week's time.

He met people who had made bad decisions in their lives - adulterers, murderers, robbers, betrayers of friends, liars - and he responded to them, not with condemnation, and anger, but with compassion. I daresay he wept for the world much more than he condemned it. I'm coming to believe as I face my own brokenness, and realize on occasion what I am capable of doing even at this point in my walk with Christ, even after all that I've come to know, and have experienced, that this is because Jesus understands better than any of us, what it really means to be 'broken'. Not because he participated in this brokenness, but because he *experienced it* on the Cross.

When Jesus looked at the world, he saw the sin, and the messes - for sure - that's what drove him to the Cross. But he also saw, beneath the bad decisions and behaviors, people who were messed up. Broken by society, by a lack of good examples, by addictions and greed, by being human ... he saw a hurting world.

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

Do we see the world with his eyes?

There are two very broad 'categories' that we can use to describe how the world hurts. One big category includes all the 'stuff' that happens to us as a result of living in this messed up world. Disasters, poverty, disease, grief, divorce, homelessness, job stresses... you know what I'm talking about. I'm going to come back to this one in a minute.

The other category is spiritual hurt. (These obviously overlap.) The world hurts because it is lost. The world generally does not know why we are here, doesn't know that we're loved, doesn't know about Grace, about God's compassion and forgiveness. *That* hurt - which is probably the worst kind - is largely responded to by our words, as we declare the truth that can set the captive free. We'll talk about that next week.

The first category, though, those hardships, we respond to in the same way Jesus did - by our actions. By doing something about them. Now, sometimes, praise God, those actions open a door for us (or someone else) to share *words* too - to have the privilege of speaking about *why* we do what we do. But not always.

This church has a long history of getting involved in both of these types of ministries (words and actions), and many, many people are now blessed because of that. I want to share an example of one way that this is happening both through our local church, and also through our Greater New Jersey Annual Conference of UM Churches. And that is how we've been responding to the Superstorm Sandy.

First, check out this video...

*** play video*

From the first days after this historic storm hit, the United Methodists in New Jersey got involved. The motto of UMCOR (United Methodist Commission on Relief) is 'first in, last out'. What I've recently discovered is that UMCOR works by equipping *local people* to be the responders. So, UMCOR in New Jersey is ... *us!*

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

This storm was the second largest disaster in terms of financial loss in the history of this country! What is often lost - as people have this image of 'rich people's shore houses' - is that thousands of people with meager means have been displaced, communities have been destroyed, churches have closed, and they have little hope of returning home without help. So, we're helping. It's what we do.

Our Annual Conference has set up a non-profit corporation to meet ongoing needs for those who are still suffering from this disaster a year later. It's a five year plan. It is called **** A Future With Hope.**

**** The Goals:**

1. Provide case management for families and individuals to help them access the necessary resources and information to rebuild their lives.
2. Provide counseling for individuals and families impacted by the storm.
3. Repair homes damaged by Superstorm Sandy, *focusing on the elderly, low-income and those with disabilities.*
4. Recruit, train, house, feed and coordinate volunteers from New Jersey and across the country to repair homes.
5. Raise \$23 million in financial donations (that's already about \$7 million!)

In the next 5 years, 20,000 volunteers will rebuild 300-500 homes and provide HOPE to families whose lives were devastated by Superstorm Sandy.

We are already participating in that response. We've taken one special offering so far, (last Fall) and sent about \$14k. We've filled flood buckets (a lot them), and we've sent people... I'd like to invite Max Fisher to give us some insight on that response, and what we can do going forward.

****Max Fisher shares...**

Good morning! (evening)

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

It is my privilege to serve as the Capitol District Emergency Response Team Coordinator. My wife Beth and I got our ERT training a few years ago, when the effort was just getting organized in the conference.

The mission of an Early Response Team is to provide a caring Christian presence in the aftermath of a disaster. The team is neither a first-responding group of emergency workers (police, fire fighters or EMT's), nor is it a rebuild / recovery team. Rather it fills a specific need in the early days after a disaster, to establish the presence of the church.

** Very soon after Sandy struck the Jersey Shore communities last Fall, the call went out from the Greater New Jersey Conference for Emergency Response Team-trained individuals to respond. Unfortunately, the Conference ERT program had not been in existence for very long, and we had few ERT's prepared to help. Our first task was to get as many of our people trained as possible... and quickly! Training seminars were scheduled, and 16 members from our church signed up to attend. We now have 18 trained responders at FUMC Moorestown, including 8 who are qualified to lead a team. We have a pool of more than 30 ERT's in the Capitol District, and a growing list of non-ERT volunteers from which to draw. With some financial assistance from the Missions Commission, we have re-equipped our missions trailer to be our ERT trailer. It is now stocked with the tools, equipment and supplies that the teams need to respond quickly in an emergency.

** From last November through February this year, FUMC Moorestown sent out 6 teams to serve the South-Jersey shore communities in multiple-day deployments. Those volunteers spent more than 1500 hours cleaning out debris and demolishing walls and floors ruined by the flooding.

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

As we move into the rebuilding phase of the recovery, progress has been frustratingly slow, mostly due to conditions beyond our control. We do anticipate a great deal of rebuilding activity in 2014 as these hurdles are overcome.

If you are interested in ERT training, or in helping out in the rebuilding effort, or would just like to know more about any of this, please e-mail me. I'll have my contact information in the bulletin for the next few weeks, or you can stop me in the hall anytime.

You know, Beth and I have been doing short-term missions work for more than 20 years, and the most important lesson that we've learned is that it is NEVER about the work... it is ALWAYS about the people.

**** It's about...** The people who decide to step out of their comfort zone here at home to go serve.

It's about... The people here at home; family, co-workers, and church family who support the mission through prayer and financial contribution.

It's about... The people that the team goes to serve, whether they are

- The local church that needs its classrooms painted
- The woman that needs a new door install on her mobile home so she can close it against the cold wind
- The 92 year old man that needs a new wood cookstove
- Or the family that needs their roof covered after a bad storm

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 5 The Hurting World

** It's about... the people that WE become when we reach out and share the love of Christ with a hurting world, because we are all changed by the experience... every time!

[Steve] We will be receiving two more offerings this year - *our communion offering on December 1 will go to this fund*, and another one around Easter time. I know we have our own financial issues here, but God is bigger than us, and Paul said that "we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength." I believe that! I hope we give sacrificially as we begin Advent by providing hope for those who have so little.

Friends, this is what it means to respond to 'the hurting world'. We see the need, and we respond in love and action.

When you fill out your covenant, there's a section called "My Witness". After some explanation comes this question:

"Where are you making yourself available to God to use you in this coming year both to serve, and to witness to your faith in words?" **That's** social holiness. It's who we are as Methodists, and as people of First UMC, Moorestown.

Amen.