

Sermon – John 1:10-18

Theme: “Pastoral Care in the light of Christ”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Introduction

The new year is a good time to take stock of the past year and to consider what has been good and what things you might consider changing. Are there parts of your life which you want to make wholesale changes to, or are there areas you want to tweak a little?

What about who we are as a congregation? Is the new year a good time to consider what we have done over the past year and whether we would like to make some changes? God’s Word encourages us to measure our actions – not according to what we think is right or wrong, but against what God wants to give us and how he calls us to respond to his Word.

Heavenly Father, thank you for leading us into a new year. Help us to serve you and those you put before us by faithfully trusting in you. Amen.

God’s Backdrop

Light – God’s light is very prominent at this time of the church year. As we begin the new year, the gospel reading from John begins with the light of the world being born into a world of darkness. Through this reading we are reminded of God’s creative work in Genesis where the first thing created was light to separate the darkness. Jesus, “the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (Jn 1:9)

So God’s world is about light. Satan’s world is the darkness which has not overcome the light. It is in the light that we are called to do our work as Christians and that work is to shine the light of Christ into the world which does not yet know Jesus. How are we to do this work of shining the light of Christ? Well its not too difficult. You see, when a person is baptised, they normally receive a candle which is lit from the Christ Candle and this symbolises that they will be shining the light of Christ in their daily living. A person who puts their trust in God cannot help but to shine Christ’s light wherever they are. It may not always be obvious, but it is always there.

Shining Christ’s light

How do we as a congregation shine Christ’s light into this community? Last year a group of people from our congregation met to consider how we might develop our model for pastoral care. One of the first things we tackled was the issue of our existing mission statement. I think it spoke volumes that even as a group, we couldn’t write out accurately our own congregation’s mission statement. How would you go today if someone asked you what is the mission of our congregation? This isn’t meant to be a test, but it is rather an opportunity to consider how we are travelling as a congregation in the work that God has given us to do.

Just for the record, our current mission statement is:

We at Trinity are part of God’s people and family. He chose us, and he meets our NEEDS through the Gospel of Christ. As His people, He asks us to meet the need of others, through that same Gospel of love and forgiveness. This is our privilege and task, in our congregation, in our community, in our world.

“OUR TASK” is “MY TASK

This is a good statement, but it just has too many words and its too prescriptive. It tells us that we should be meeting the needs of others. Now this is a fine sentiment, but that means we need to be studying and understanding the needs of others. Which means we need to determine who those others are and then what are their needs. Then we need to set up programmes which meet those needs. And are we talking about their spiritual needs, physical needs, or maybe their emotional needs? And so we go on.

Our group which met considered there were three things that were important in considering what a revised mission statement might look like. They are: 1) *who* we are; 2) *what* do we do; and 3) *why* do we do it. Who, what and why. Notice that there is no how. The how is left up to the work of the Holy Spirit to guide us both as individuals and as a congregation. By taking the ‘how’ out of the statement, we are trusting that God will lead us in ways we might not have ever imagined.

Now are mission statement might look like this:

“God has called us to shine the light of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit into the time and place God has placed us”.

“God has called us” – this is who we are as God’s children. He has called us by name, he loves us, he cares for us and we are special to him. The work we are called to do is answered by Jesus when the disciples asked him what

was the work of God. Jesus answered, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (Jn 6:29) So the work of God is to believe in Jesus Christ and the salvation he won for us on the cross. When we *believe* in Jesus, we are shining *his* light into the world of darkness.

Jesus didn’t say, “when you hand out blankets”, or “when you feed the poor”, or “when you give someone a job”. When you *believe* in him, then you are doing his work. Now none of those ideas of helping other people are wrong, its just that we might do them *because we believe* instead of thinking we have to do them because that’s what God wants us to do.

“God has called us to shine the light of Christ.” Now we don’t do this because any of us are particularly special. Trinity Lutheran Church doesn’t shine the light of Christ because it’s a great congregation. We *do* shine the light of Christ ‘by the power of the Holy Spirit’. Luther writes in his Small Catechism that we “cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him.” Our natural tendency is to turn away from God. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, by trusting in him to lead us, we not only can shine the light of Christ, we *can’t help* but shine his light into the world around us.

“God has called us to shine the light of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Okay, that’s good, but we don’t shine the light of Christ into a vacuum. God has put each one of you into a particular time and place. It’s called Cairns and its 2009. Now is the time that God is calling you, now is the time that God is empowering you to do his work – that is to believe in Jesus and by doing so, you won’t help but to shine his light into your world. For each and everyone of you, this will look different. Some of you will be in paid employment; some are children growing up; others are looking after parents; others will be listening to someone who is suffering. Whatever you are doing, when you put *your* life into God’s hands, the things you are called to do will shine the light of Christ into the lives of those around you.

Shining Christ’s light – Our Congregation

How might we as a congregation shine the light of Christ into the lives of those God puts before us? Well the answer is there are many ways and we are already doing many things. But one area in which we could deliberately do more, is to pastorally care for those people who already come to us in times of need. Who are these people? Would you be surprised if I said more than 200 hundred people came to our church last year and asked us to be the church for them at the time they needed it most? You see last year we had seven funerals, seven weddings, and twelve baptisms. For each of these events we had families who asked us to serve them by being church.

This is a wonderful blessing and a terrific opportunity for us to serve and we do it well. What we aren’t doing so well is following up with these same people to continue caring for them after their initial pastoral needs have been met. Imagine if we continued to reach out to these families because Jesus continues to reach out to us.

What if those who were married came to a retreat weekend the year after they were married to share stories and challenges – all under the protective umbrella of God’s love to strengthen them further? Could we run such a retreat for those we have already supported?

What if those who had children baptised were given the opportunity to be blessed at a service in the years following their child’s baptism? What if we hosted a parenting weekend? What if we had surrogate grandparents who could mind a child for an evening? Could we support young families like this?

What if we deliberately had people who could visit families who had loved ones who had died in the previous year or two – to be with them as they grieve, not to help, just to be there? Could we offer this level of care to those who are hurting?

There are a lot of ‘what if’ questions there and I don’t have the answer to all of them. But you do. As a congregation God has called us to shine the light of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit into *this time and place*. As the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Congregation I invite you to consider how you, and how we can pastorally care and support those who are already coming to us, asking us to be the church for them. Write down your ideas and share them with the pastoral assistants, with the Church Council or with myself so together we can shine the light of Christ in this community.

2009 is a new year with new opportunities. What you do in this year is not really that important. But what God does through you, by his mighty power, that *is* life changing. Not for you, for your lives were forever changed when you were adopted by God in holy baptism. But it will change the lives of those people for whom you shine God’s light, his love into their world.

And the may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus in this new year. Amen.