

Pastor Daryl Diddle

WFMC Mission: Our Role in World Redemption

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**Acts 14:21-23 (NIV)**

<sup>21</sup> (Barnabas and Paul) preached the gospel in (Derbe) and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. <sup>23</sup> Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

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We're in Acts, Chapter 14, today, if you'd care to take a Bible and turn back there. Acts 14 – the passage that was just read for us.

We're investing two weeks here in reviewing our church's vision and mission, starting last week with vision, which we defined as our destination.

**Vision** is where we want to go.

If the future were ours to write, how would we write it?

That is vision. And we said that our vision, because it's God's vision, is a redeemed world. A world, foretold by Isaiah and others in Scripture, that comes through the salvation and kingship of Jesus, the Messiah.

A world where creation is restored – returned to as it was in Eden – and where the lion and lamb and everything and everyone else live in peace.

That is where God is heading. That's God's ultimate future for our world, and we work with our Heavenly Father when that becomes our vision as well.

We called it a community that reflects Jesus' vision and values, and that's the future we want to see.

That's our vision.

How do we get there?

That is our mission.

**Mission** is the path to the future, to the vision.

And put in a sentence, this is how we see it: We, as a church, will faithfully offer to neighbors, near and far, the word of God, the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Now, we could take weeks talking through this. There is a lot to it. But let me just hit the highest points here.

We, as a church family, will faithfully offer...

We recognize our neighbors are made in God's image and are, therefore, intelligent and discerning, and though perhaps somewhat blinded to truth by the enemy, they are also being influenced by God's Spirit in our world.

So, in offering them the truth we've come to know and embrace about Jesus, we do not insist, badger, bully, demand, threaten or intimidate. We simply do all we can to offer, through our testimony and witness, as the apostle Peter says, the reason for the hope that we have in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

And, we do this *faithfully*, meaning we offer both *consistently* (not giving up) and also in manner that trusts God to speak through us even in our own weakness, since in Him we are strongest when we are weak.<sup>2</sup>

We... will faithfully offer to neighbors near and far...

This speaks to our scope. We offer testimony and truth to neighbors *near*: those with whom we work and attend school, those who live nearby, those we see at the stores and on our streets.

And, we offer to neighbors *far*: those of other cities, states, peoples and nations. We recognize the Church to be a global community with a global responsibility, so we engage personally where we can go, and with our prayers and finances where we can't go ourselves.

Again, we see as true John Wesley's claim that, "the world is our parish," so we bear spiritual responsibility on a large scale.

In order to achieve a community that reflects Jesus' vision and values: *we will faithfully offer, to neighbors near and far, ... what? What will we offer them?*

At least these four things:

First, The Word of God.

This is first because this is where it all begins. All of our wisdom, to one degree or another, rises out of this book, which we affirm to be the infallible message of God graciously given to His creation.

It is a word that saves, redeems, restores, and transforms, and it needs to be carefully and urgently presented.

Why? Because it contains the medicine for what ails our world, and even though the world around may not respect it, recognize it, value it or even particularly want it, we offer it to them lovingly, winsomely, patiently, and even creatively for the sake of their own healing.

There are lots of sources of small "t" truth in our world, but only the Church can offer capital "T" Truth, and our mission is to do so.

We have the cure for both present sinfulness and eternal torment, and we would be absolutely evil if we selfishly withheld it from others while keeping it to ourselves.

We faithfully offer neighbors, near and far, the word of God and the Love of the Father...

This get us into the unique roles of the Trinity, you see?

We let our neighbors know the fact that they are loved by the God Who created them and Who very much wants to relate with them, and we offer them God's love by loving them ourselves, unconditionally.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:10

Now, that doesn't mean we always agree with them. But we choose to love them, letting God's love work through us.

As the apostle John said, "*We love because He first loved us.*"<sup>3</sup>

*We faithfully offer neighbors near and far, the word of God, the love of the Father and the grace of the Jesus...*

We offer to all around us the message of that same unmerited favor that *we* know and experience *ourselves* through the sacrifice of Jesus, God's Son.

Any true Church of Jesus Christ should be a place known for mercy, forgiveness, patience and everything else associated with Jesus' grace.

Now, this does not mean that we are a people who ignore truth and give in to our society's every whim or to political correctness or to meaningless sentiment. We do not agree with ungodly precepts just to keep in the good graces of others, or of society.

It does mean, though, that we understand that those who don't know Jesus *couldn't possibly* have the same convictions as those who do, and so we're gracious in our recognition of their own journey.

We live, and we treat others, in a manner that recalls with clarity the *grace* that Jesus showed *us* when *we, ourselves*, were *utterly lost* in sin.

We remember those Christians who were gracious with us before we knew Jesus, and we want to be that for others.

Toward achieving the vision of a redeemed world, we work this mission of *faithfully offering neighbors, near and far, the word of God, the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit.*

As followers of Jesus, we have both the blessing and the responsibility of sharing with our neighbors this tremendous truth that through His Spirit God is at work in our world today, bringing, to those who embrace Him, healing, transformation, restoration, and deep peace, joy and rest.

Our message is that God offers opportunity for change, real change, right now. We are not hopelessly locked in to whatever mess in which we may find ourselves.

God's Spirit is powerful, and He is here and wants to work in us and our circumstances for good.

This is our path to a community that reflects Jesus' vision and values: all of us, both individually and together as a church family, faithfully offering neighbors near and far the word of God, the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

None of this is new.

This is, essentially, what Jesus told us to do in the Great Commission.

This is also what we see happening all through the book of Acts: followers of Jesus faithfully, skillfully, truthfully and lovingly showing and telling those around them, both near and far, the truth of who God is, what He's done through Jesus and what He continues to do in His world through His Spirit.

Th passage in Acts 14 is just one example.

Paul and Barnabas went wherever the Spirit led them, offering Christ, offering truth, helping people on to ever deeper experiences with God, and then committing them to

Him (as verse 23 in our text says) "*in whom they had put their trust.*"

They recognized that it was not their responsibility to save the world – that is Jesus' part.

Their part was, and our part now is, to faithfully show and tell, living and speaking the truth of God, and then let the Lord do what He'll do. Because, whether we like it or not, God's plan to redeem the world includes *using us* to introduce Him to others, so that persons, families, neighborhoods, towns and even nations might experience the salvation of Jesus and the transformation of His Spirit.

That's how you get to a world that reflects Jesus.

But please notice one other detail in this passage there in verse 22, where Paul and Barnabas say, "*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*"

Do you know why they said that?

For one reason, because Jesus said it. John 16, verse 33: "*In this world you will have troubles.*"

They also say that here because they lived it – as Jesus lived it.

You see, some are tempted to think that just because the mission is *God's* and the mission is *good*, then the mission will be *easy*.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Do you know why?

Because there is tremendous resistance to God in our world. Thanks to Satan, our enemy – whose temptation caused the need for redemption in the first place, this world resists God strongly.

*"The nations rage and conspire. The peoples plot rebellion. Earth's leaders band together and rise up against the Lord and His people."*<sup>4</sup>

You see, the world and all that's in it belong to the Lord.

But those who don't know Him think it belongs to them.

God has His vision for the future. But the unsaved of the world have their own vision for the future, and they will fight viciously to preserve their own control and kingdoms.

The fact is, it is a war – a spiritual war – being fought in our world's present reality.

Just like most wars, this war's end-goal is peace.

But most missions necessary to achieve that peace are neither easy nor peaceful themselves.

So, we cannot engage this mission thinking it will be easy. This will be hard, and working it out will bring both success and suffering.

In the process of working our mission, some people will be very grateful because they'll receive Jesus and gain freedom.

At the same time, working out our mission will make other people very, very mad, because we're implicitly telling them that their way is not correct – that it is not God's way.

So, there will be anger, violence, rage, resistance and rebellion – just as the Psalmist said.

Have you noticed that already?

If you're at all engaged in the mission of God, then I know that you have noticed this.

But that cannot stop us from working out the mission.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:19

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 2:1-4

We follow Jesus, who was treated abominably, but still completed His mission.

We follow the apostles, who were treated nearly as badly as Jesus, yet still completed their mission.

For much of America's history, we have been the exception; however, look at how terribly Christians through the ages have been treated in most times and places – but they worked their mission anyway.

And so must we today.

To be a Christ-follower – to be part of Christ's body – is to be someone on mission, because He's the Head of the body. To be connected to Him means we do what He says and what He does.

And He has passed both God's vision and His mission on to us.

The future is a redeemed world. A community that reflects Jesus' vision and values.

How do we get there?

We faithfully offer neighbors near and far:  
the word of God,  
the love of the Father,  
the grace of the Son,  
and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We cannot control what we offer them.

We cannot control how they respond to us.

We can control, however, our engagement in the mission.

And God wants to know today: *who is on mission with Him?*

There is no middle ground on this, really. We either *are* or we *aren't*.

We're either *walking* and *working with* Him *toward* the vision, toward the future – *or* we're pulling *away* from Him and going in another direction.

So I urge you to consider your life and make today the day to decide.

Jesus *is* King, and He's returning someday to complete the vision.

Until then, He's given all who follow Him this to do.

Paul and Barnabas did it.

Peter did it.

John did it.

Christ-followers through the ages did it.

Some were lauded. Most were not.

Either way, the mission now falls to us.

Will you engage?

Will you work?

Will you give yourself to the mission, so the vision can become reality?

We want to be a church that says "yes" to the mission – so the vision might be fulfilled.

Closing Prayer

Service of Holy Communion

Closing Song: *Who Is On The Lord's Side?* (Verses 1 and 4)

Benediction: We want to be a church – a people – that says "yes" to the mission, so the vision might be fulfilled.

In our lifetime?

Some think so.

Some do not.

In the end, it doesn't really matter.

What matters is faithfulness today:

faithfully keeping the vision of a redeemed world before us,

and faithfully working the mission of living and offering God's good news. Amen.