



January 17, 2021

Missio Dei Sermon

Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey

There is something which was unplanned, but wonderful, in our music in this morning's worship. Our Hymns and Gloria Patri are "triumphal" descriptive of our image of God. Yet, the Prelude, Anthem, Offertory, all are quite pensive, yearning, searching, as if describing God's emotion in this Tango with us.

I love our Mission Statement:

"To make Christ known through reconciliation while communicating respect and love to all people." We begin with Jesus Christ. Any community that begins with Christ and Reconciliation, acknowledges we have a past, and we are not perfect. I do not know the Mission Statements of ALL SAINTS' Churches, but here in the Valley, we love and respect aware that we have not always been perfect. The Presbyterian Church has gone through numerous splits and divisions and reUnions. From 1850 until 1983 there was a Northern Presbyterian Church and there was a Southern Presbyterian Church, separated in Missions, Theology, Finances, Authority and Social Witness; and several times the leadership tried to bring them together. Finally in 1983, the body merged. But for the next 30 years each side played GOTCHA by adding Amendments to the Constitution, until the Constitution was literally three times the volume. So in 2015, the Church started again, recognizing that local churches will have their own rules. But the leadership also added a section before all the rest on **FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES**. These provided the mutually accepted basis for all that comes after. First among those Foundations are: "We believe in the **Mission of God**", second "**Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church**" and being Trinitarian that "**The Holy Spirit gives differing individuals different gifts.**" We believe God is the Creator, but we do not believe God stopped there... Instead, as described throughout Advent and Christmas, like the story of Pygmalion, our Creator cared so much the Creator entered into Creation, God became one with us. And GOD has a Mission. God's desire is that we would become more than what we are. God sent Christ into the world, to model for us Christ's Church. This is NOT Craig's Church, it is not Diane's Church, God love him it is not Joe Hawkins' Church, this is the Church of Jesus Christ, he is the Head of the Church, and it is to glorify him that we worship. It sounds self-evident but churches located in different places have different concerns.

Being located south of Tucson, several of our Mission concerns are related to Tucson and South of us at the border with Mexico. With a transient predominantly retired population, it is logical that one of our identities, one of God's Mission's for us is to own a Moving Van and assist people who are downsizing to take their donations and sell these to support the Session in Missions. That same ministry probably would not make sense in California, North Dakota, Nebraska, or North Carolina. It is who we are in Green Valley. If you were to describe our church to a stranger, what else is foundational to our identity? We are a Presbyterian Church? A Stephen Ministry Church? We have a phenomenal Choir? We provide extensive pastoral care? Maybe the best way of describing Who we are and what we Believe is to say "Come, See."

The Gospel of John begins in a wonderful way. The Day after Jesus' Baptism by John, John is standing with a group of his disciples, and seeing Jesus identifies "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." I do not think this is how I would like to be identified, but it is John's foundational identity of who Jesus is! Jesus died for humanity. Not for the Jews only, but all the world. Not only as a martyr, but

as a sacrifice for our sins. God sent Jesus into the world to change the world, and to accomplish this not only did God need to take on human life, but then to give that life for us.

If your Leader, your Mentor, Priest and Teacher, John the Baptist pointed someone out, the natural thing to do would be to follow them and try to get to know who they were, what their agenda might be. John describes this somewhat comic interaction, of the two disciples trying to observe Jesus without influencing him or getting caught. There is a natural human tendency that we are willing to help others, but we do not want to affect what they choose to do. Much like “the Prime Directive” in the television show Star Trek, we can observe so long as we do not do anything to alter the natural development of this stranger. However, you envision them turning a corner, only to be confronted by Jesus, who asks: “What do you seek?” There is this idiotic response from the disciples, which I recall from Greek Class is a direct translation, that when asked what do you seek, they respond “Where are you staying?” and Jesus responds “Come and See.”

The Gospel of John then makes the Calling of Disciples, understanding of who and what the church is, personal. Philip, Andrew and Simon who would be called Peter are all from Bethsaida in Galilee, and he says “Follow Me.” And Philip finds Nathaneal, and Philip tells the story of “We have found the one whom all Israel has been seeking since the beginning, Jesus of Nazareth. But Nathaneal is recorded as being a skeptic, because he replies **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”** Nazareth was not a major metropolis. Nazareth was a small farming town of about 500 people, it’s only claim to culture was that Nazareth was located near Sepphoris, which at the time was the location for the Jewish Sanhedrin, so Sepphoris would have been similar to a University Town. But with Nathaneal insulting Jesus’ hometown, Jesus plays a wordplay with Nathaneal by saying **“An Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”** Remember that the original patriarch named Israel was Jacob who wrestled with God and previously had been known for deceiving his Brother Esau and Father Isaac.

I would propose that a significant portion of who we are is represented by the Missions we provide, the people whom we try to make a difference in their lives. There are churches which write letter campaigns to Advocacy Groups and their Senators or Congressmen. Just as there are churches for whom “missions” represents writing a check. One of the things that delights me is that our Missions are each ministries where a member of our church community is involved.

Similar to the repartee between Jesus and Nathanael the children supported through YOTO have not come from the best places or the strongest of families. Cece was regularly told by her mother that she was unwanted, a financial burden to their family, so Cece moved in with her grandmother who was in poor health and could only offer her a bed in which to sleep. YOTO provided Cece clothing and food and hygiene supplies.

By age 14, both of Gabriel’s parents had overdosed on drugs, and he was responsible for his 10 year old sister. The turning point in his life came when people through Youth on Their Own CARED ABOUT HIM. Gabriel changed from depression and panic attacks to earning a 4.0 GPA, earning scholarships to Pima College and is now an Airplane mechanic.

Diego was constantly surrounded by verbal abuse from his mother, who kicked him out of her house. On the street he wound up in Juvenile Court. Through YOTO he received help with school supplies and food. His counselors describe he went from the body language of a gang member to a Straight A Student. Diego is a Junior in High School and looking forward to enrolling in the US Armed Forces after graduation.

This morning, we had hoped David and Pam Lovett could be here, but due to COVID 19 they were unable to travel. How do you teach people in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Iran about wearing a Mask, washing with Soap and Water, not touching others, when the people are unable to read and write, among the lowest caste of day laborers and do not have access to clean water or soap?

On the 31st of the month, we are having our NOISY OFFERING to benefit Companeros en Mision, a Companion Ministry to assist those at our border with Mexico. In order to have an interview to enter the United States legally, families need to wait at the border for months, to be available when their Lawyer or Customs Officials call you forward. During that time, to have someone to walk along beside you when you are alone, to translate and speak English, to escort you to the Doctor or Dentist (for you or your children), is an incredible ministry.

Samaritan's Purse recently had a severely burned toddler in Mexico who needed surgery at Shriners' Hospital in Sacramento. During COVID with the Border closed, how do you get a toddler to California, but by the grace of God with a lot of mission help, Jaciel and his mother made the journey. The description from Laura Romero was that throughout the journey, Jaciel never cried, but was filled with fear, and now is laughing.

Casa Vida Neuva para Ninos cares for 48 orphaned children all of whom are healthy. 8 Laptops were purchased for the older children who are attending school from the Home.

What is God's Mission for us at Valley Presbyterian? Our Foundation is in Jesus Christ's Reconciliation. It is also easy to see, that through our involvement, prayers and caring we are making a difference in the lives of others locally and around the world.