

Our Mission

Sunday School Lesson

Matthew 28:16-20

May 12, 2024

Last month at our Lunch & Learn Fellowship after church, we worked on discerning our Core Values. Understanding our values was one of the tools we used in Connected in Christ, an Arkansas Conference ministry training that begun in 2001. The clergy selected to participate were divided into groups of twelve pastors who committed to four weeklong retreats over a two-year period. In addition, we were to select a small group from our congregation to attend four Saturday training sessions. Identifying our core values, our core beliefs, and our mission and vision statement were critical before you could start developing a ministry plan for your personal ministry or for the church.

They gave us a worksheet to help identify core values and while it could be very confusing, we were able to simplify it into a useable form. This year, our DS gave me the opportunity to take a course with the Texas Methodist Foundation and when that course brought up the importance of Core Values, I thought it might be helpful for our church to do this exercise. We started with SPRC and it was hard. The week before our Lunch & Learn, Susan Beaumont, a well-known church consultant, laid out a new method for determining Core values and that is what we used that Sunday. The results were truly amazing. The engagement in this project was even more amazing. We had a clear picture of how our congregation sees its mission. The top two values were mission and hospitality. This has become who we are and how we feel called to serve God.

Gathering in Fellowship and Worship, Love, and Spiritual Growth completed our values even though we express these values in different ways. Our Scripture for today is the Great Commission. Each church must figure out their role in fulfilling the Great Commission within their ministry context.

Let us pray

O Holy God and Creator of the Universe, thank you for being present with us this week. Open our hearts to hear your word so we may be faithful disciples who are known by our love for one another and for our neighbors. Amen.

Our Purpose Statement: To accept that the Great Commission Jesus gave to The Eleven is our work, too.

Read Matthew 28:16-20

Last week I made a statement in my sermon that provides one of the many reasons I love the Bible so much. Our Bibles contain multiple voices speaking on the same subject and they are not always in line with one another. Proverbs tells us that if we are virtuous and follow the laws of God, our lives will be blessed. Job tells us that bad things still happen to those who follow the laws and are virtuous. God's love is simple and yet, it is complex so, other than Jesus, God allows for multiple voices in Scripture. Even with Jesus, we get four different gospels that vary greatly in context. In our lesson for today,

we are reading through the lens of Matthew, a Jewish Christian who spend a great deal of time laying out the case that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He did this by including scriptures from the various prophets.

But Matthew, like Luke, told the story of a Jesus that was not just for the Jew, but also for the Gentile. He begins his gospel with a genealogy. While that was a common way to begin the story of someone, Matthew's gospel had a twist. Most genealogies only included men. It was a way of proving lineage from one patriarch to another. Matthew included women and to make it even more scandalous, Matthew included Gentile women in Jesus' family tree. So you have Rahab, a prostitute, Tamar, a daughter-in-law who tricked her father-in-law. You have Ruth and Bathsheba. All four were Gentiles. Then you have an unwed teenage mother who was Jewish but unmarried. Her name is Mary. This sets up a Gospel that is intended to include and not exclude.

Matthew is the only Gospel to have the magi, wise men from the east. Matthew ends his gospel with Jesus telling us to preach, teach, and healing everyone. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone

Our lesson asks us to wonder how we are doing in fulfilling this holy commission. As your pastor, according to our last Learn & Learn, our congregation has a very clear vision of its mission. Camden has the second highest poverty rate of any Arkansas town or city. Our Food Ministries connects us to these neighbor in need of food. How we treat them when they come to our Food Pantry or Sue's Table is our witness to them. As a result of you treating our neighbors with the love of Christ, we now have three of our neighbors coming to Bible Study during the week. Others have asked for Bibles or reading materials and we always respond positively. Our volunteers have developed a real heart for this work. When they work, they are, indeed, the hands and feet of Christ.

We have other ministries that reach out in our area. Our youth program includes youth from families not in our congregation. Vacation Bible School has the ability to reach children. We have worked with other churches such as Zion Hill and Bethel AME. Until COVID, we sponsored a weekly devotional program at the Ouachita County rehab. Thank you for your compassion for others. May we continue to go forth and make disciples for Jesus in our community.

Let us pray:

O Holy God, may you be glorified in my life. May we glorify you in our church through all its ministries. Teach us to walk as children of light even when we face darkness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.