

Sermon: Following Christ
November 3 and 4, 2007
Mission Statement: Week 1

We have a new mission statement
here at Good Shepherd.
A team was put together to work on it
has been working on it for a couple years,
and just recently Council approved it.

It's printed in your bulletin
in the sermon notes section.
Would you read it with me:

**Following Christ,
Growing in faith,
Sharing God's love.**

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Growing in faith,
Sharing God's love.

A number of years ago,
our Council was working with a consultant
from Lay Renewal Ministries.
He asked the Council if we had a mission statement.
We all knew we had one.
Then he asked us what it said.
The consultant had a copy in front of him—
--and kind of prompted us
as we struggled to share
the essentials of our mission statement.

It was 70-some words long,
great ideas,
but hard to remember
and keep in mind.

After the retreat,
he sent us a nice note—
--praising our congregation and leadership.
And in polite words
he said, in essence:
“You have a very nice mission statement,
but it might be more effective if you knew it.”

So, after talking about the idea for a couple years,
we put together a team
and went to work.

For those of you who have worked with corporate or personal mission statements,
the ideas are probably familiar.

--We wanted something with 10 words or less,
so we could remember it.

--Ideally we wanted something that passed the 3 in the morning test.

If someone called you at 3 in the morning,
woke you up,
and asked you the mission statement,
you could remember it and repeat it.

And of course,

we wanted something that was truly our mission—
--truly what God calls us to do and to be.

We wanted it to apply to each person,
not just the church structure—
--but the church.

Because you are the church.

The people of God are the church.

And so, how does the mission statement apply to you?

We wanted it to answer that question.

We must have gone through at least 100 different possibilities.

I'd bring an idea I was really excited about,
and the group wasn't always enthused.

Or the group would settle on something,
send it out to other groups for response,
and they weren't excited.

You know what finally helped us.

We finally realized that we couldn't come up with
the perfect mission statement.

We needed to give up that dream.

We weren't going to find a combination of 10 words
that inspired everyone in the congregation,
that matched all our thoughts and dreams.

We finally decided we needed to decide.

And if in a year or two,

we decide it's time to change the mission statement—

--that's fine.

But in the meantime,
would you read our mission statement with me again.

Our mission is:

**Following Christ,
Growing in faith,
Sharing God's love.**

So today and the next two weeks,
Pastor Tom and I are going to take a phrase a week
and preach about our mission.
What is God calling us to be and to do?

And so today,
we focus on the two words:
Following Christ.

I read a story about Abraham Lincoln.
Don't know if it's true or not.
But it's a good story.

He went to a slave auction one day
and was appalled at the sights and the sounds
of buying and selling human beings.
His heart was especially drawn to a young woman on the block
whose story seemed to be told in her eyes.
She looked with suspicion and fear on everyone around her.
She had been used and abused her whole life.
And this was one more humiliation.

The bidding began for this woman
and Lincoln offered a bid.
The bidding continued,
and Lincoln kept bidding higher and higher,
surpassing all the other bids,
until he won.

When he paid the auctioneer the money
and took title to the young woman,
she stared at him with contempt and fear.

She asked:

“What are you going to do with me?”

He said:

“I’m going to set you free.”

“Free?”

she asked.

“Free for what?”

“Just free,”

Lincoln answered.

“Completely free.”

“Free to do whatever I want to do?”

“Yes, he said,

“Free to do whatever you want to do.”

“Free to say whatever I want to say?”

“Yes, free to say whatever you want to say.”

“Free to go wherever I want to go?”

she asked with skepticism.

Lincoln answered:

“You are free to go anywhere you want to go.”

She thought a moment,

and then said:

“Then I’m going with you.”

Following Christ.

Jesus sets us free,
at great cost to himself.
The cost of the cross.
The cost of humiliation and rejection.
The cost of suffering and death.

In response to that amazing gift,
that amazing grace,
what can we do but follow?

Following Christ
through good times and bad.
Following Christ
through struggles and joys.
Following Christ
wherever Christ leads.

As we worked on shaping this mission statement,
we often tried to modify “Following Christ”.

We talked about:

- Joyfully following Christ; or
- Following Christ into service; or
- Following Jesus into lives of worship, growth and service.

But we were never really satisfied
with the modifiers.
Following Christ can be a joyful thing.
But it's not always joyful.
And when it's not joyful,
we still are called to follow.

We don't always know
where Jesus will lead us when we follow.
We don't know what our lives will bring.
But following Christ is central
in whatever we're doing.

We follow Christ—
--each of us,
--every day,
--every way.

It will look different for you and for me.
You have different gifts than I have.
You have different concerns than I have.
Each of us is different.

But each of us is centered as we follow Christ.

(How is God calling you to follow Jesus this week?
You might wish to jot down a couple ideas.
For you.
This week.)

There are two Bible verses in your sermon notes.

The first one is Luke 9:23.
Would you read it with me?

**Then he said to them all,
“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves
and take up their cross daily and follow me.”**

A couple things stand out to me in that passage.
At the very beginning it says,
“Then he said to.....
them all.”
I think that’s significant.
It doesn’t say,
“then he said to the pastors” or
“then he said to the Church Council” or
“then he said to the Sunday School teachers”.

What does it say?
Then he said to
them all.

That’s you and
that’s me.

“If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves
and take up their cross....
(what?)
....daily.
And follow me.

Following Jesus isn't something you do once
and then you're done.
Take up your cross daily.
Every day we remember our baptism.
Every day we remember our call.
Every day we remember that our mission is:
Following Christ.

And every day
we need God's strength to follow.
Every day
we need Jesus presence with us.
Every day
we need the Holy Spirit guiding us.

Following Christ.

And that leads us to the second Bible passage in the sermon notes.
Please read that one with me.

**My sheep hear my voice,
I know them
and they follow me.**

On Monday nights
we have a Bible study here at church
and we talk about the Bible readings for the next weekend.
We agreed that this one was a very comforting verse.

Following Christ isn't always easy,
it's not always comfortable,
it's not always fun.
But we're never alone.

The Good Shepherd
is always with us—
--guiding, comforting, strengthening, leading.

Follow Christ.

My favorite prayer in the Green hymnbook
is on page 153.
We read it together every once in a while.
Let's read it together today.

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Christ our Lord. Amen

Following Christ,
Growing in Faith,
Sharing God's Love.

In Jesus' name,
Amen