

Mission Festival – January 19,20,22-- 2012
Peace Lutheran Church – Hartford, WI
Sermon by Rev. Dan Koelpin
“FOCUSED ON MISSION”

Perhaps never before in the world's history has it been more important to be focused than now. Haven't you noticed with distractions and amusements on every hand people are losing sight of what is important – their relationships with family members and with God, their sense of meaning in their lives. Having a purpose for one's life is one of the most important ingredients of living. How many people in hospitals and nursing homes don't die simply because they have no purpose for going on? How many people are there in your acquaintance that haven't known for a long time what they've wanted out of their marriage, their job, or out of life itself -- and you wonder if they ever will. Today there is also the other extreme --- people giving themselves to trivial purposes. Many lives are today are very active, seeing every movie at the video store, eating at every restaurant in town, and making every sale at the shopping mall. Yet this blur of activity is a kind of chasing after the wind, people are exhausted with their schedules and yet feel empty, like there is no purpose or meaning to what they're doing . Is it little wonder that one of the biggest book sellers on the market a few years back was the book entitled “The Purpose Driven Life”. That's because today the scourge of our times is purposeless living, and people want meaning to their lives.

The key to a focused life is first to determine what's worthwhile in life and then to give our time and attention to it. If there are only so many books you can read in a lifetime, doesn't it make sense to read only the best? If you only have so much time isn't it far more important to give it to worthwhile purposes than to squander and waste it on the non-consequential. You and I have only one life to invest - only so many resources, so many talents, only so many years and that's it, that's all. It would be a tragedy to spend that life on anything less than the most supreme, the most worthwhile of values. We need to either be convinced or continually reminded that the supreme values, those worth seeking and

having, are those which meet our deepest needs. This rules out money as a worthwhile goal. Money can buy comfort for the body, but not peace for the soul. It can purchase a house, but it can't turn it into a happy home. It can secure a hospital room and the finest of physicians, but it can't guarantee health or long life. The same holds true for the amassing of possessions. The bible makes it clear that “a man's life does not consist of the abundance of the things that he possesses.” Luke 12:15 Modern advertising as a whole says just the opposite. It says you are what you wear, what you drive, where you live. The average American is bombarded with 1400 ads a day to buy things he doesn't need with money he doesn't have, sometimes to impress people that he doesn't even like. The minute a person buys into the premise that he needs things to make him happy, then it stands to reason that he needs more things to make him more happy and he is already on a treadmill that never stops. Things are not evil in and of themselves, a sofa is a thing, an appliance is a thing, a car is a thing. Yet what the bible says about things is important. It says “do love not the world or **anything** that is in the world” (I John 2:15, and “the pagans (unbelievers) run after all these things.” (Matt. 6:32) You want to ask yourself how much of your time you spend working for things, shopping for things, repairing things, trading things, hauling things around, maintaining things? What suffers as a consequence is relationships. Many kids would much rather have their parents than the junk their parents throw at them because their feeling guilty that they are not giving themselves. Many of us might not believe that if we had two or three times as much as we have right now, we wouldn't be any happier, but the truth is we wouldn't. Whenever we make something outside of ourselves the source of our joy (our house, our possessions, even another person our spouse or children) we're setting ourselves up for a fall, because it can all (any person or thing) be taken from us— and then where is our happiness? Contentment is not found in that which is without but in that which is within.

Our supreme needs are not economic or material at all; they are spiritual. Our supreme needs are a quiet heart and inward peace, a freedom from guilt, the steady courage that comes from faith, and a life of

fulfillment and meaning. Those are things only God can give us in Jesus Christ, but having them we can cope with everything else. We do find peace in the salvation he has provided and we do find fulfillment and meaning for our lives carrying out his plan and purpose for us. Unlike the people of our generation who are chasing after the wind, our Lord has called us, his people, to be people of purpose.

Shortly before his ascension into heaven, Jesus gathered his disciples together to give them one final directive. He said, **'therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'** This directive was so all encompassing in scope, so universal in its reach, so timeless in its application that it continues to stand to this day as the unifying focus of the church's activity to all who take God's word seriously. This morning we want to emphasize the importance of keeping our focus on the clearly defined mission set forth by Christ and the tragedy that occurs when we fail to do that as well as the blessing that happens when we do.

The mission of God is a rescue mission, but it did not begin with these words of the Great Commission. It began in the counsels of eternity when God saw lost mankind and prepared a plan to save him. He sent his one and only son Jesus to live the life we could not live and to pay the price for sins we could not pay. When Jesus said, **"it is finished"** (John 19:30) on the cross, everything necessary for the payment of your sins and mine, for the sins of the entire world was accomplished. But the rescue mission was not finished yet, since many had not heard that they had been rescued. So the Lord sent his apostles and spokesmen, and they went from city to city, from country to country, from century to century until finally His love reached down to us. God's grace was shown to us in that he sent his Holy Spirit to bring us to faith in Jesus as their Savior of our sin. We could think about it for an eternity and never figure out why it was that God chose us to have that truth. What a blessing to be able to fall asleep at night with the peace that our sins have been forgiven, with the sure hope that those who have died before us in Christ are in heaven. That's a hope many others

don't have. We could've been born in places like India or Indonesia where people are steeped in superstition and poverty, where the children fight with the animals over the scraps of food in the garbage dumps. There is nothing in us that deserved us grace. We'll never know why we received such grace, but we do know one of the reasons for which we received such grace and truth. We received it that we might pass the message of grace on to others. Outside of the strengthening of our own faith one of the foremost reasons why we exist to spread the truth we know to others as Jesus directs us here in his commission.

A clearly defined focus is important. Much confusion has been caused in Christendom because leaders and church members have often been focused on different goals than the ones set forth by Jesus. There are those who believe that the primary focus of the church should be to provide fellowship opportunities where they can meet friends. There are others who feel that the church should be primarily focused on providing works of charity, building hospitals, orphanages, and shelters for the homeless. There are others still who are convinced that the church should be principally committed to effecting change in the political arena, but does it matter what everybody else thinks? Who has the right to set the agenda for the church's business? Is it not the one who has all authority in heaven and in earth? And his goal is the discipline of every person on earth.

Even among us who know and agree with the real intent of our Savior's instruction to reach the lost, there is often an unintentional loss of focus. Because our personal needs and our local congregational needs loom large in front of us we tend to be take care of those first, at times in pretty good style; and because the oceans of spiritually dying are far removed from us, it's easy to forget them and the missionaries who are trying to reach them. With just a little more awareness we could be reaching so many more. We establish Christian schools to disciple our youth which is valid and Scriptural, but even there we have to be careful that we don't make them havens where we gather together our own kind of people and celebrate our academic and athletic achievements rather than training disciples who are

going to penetrate our dark world and make a difference. We can with the best of intentions concentrate on producing inspiring worship services and understanding the word of God properly and then fail to do what the Word has instructed us to do, namely to get on with the work of proclaiming to the unbelieving world the saving truth we know. We don't only learn to know, we learn to go.

There are those who believe that throughout history Christ's followers have managed to do just about everything else but complete the basic task the Lord has given to them. Down the ages the church has fought Crusades, built huge cathedrals, conducted elaborate ceremonies, erected hospitals and established prestigious institutions of learning, but it has not yet completed the main task Christ has given to it. We have to ask ourselves some basic questions. How firmly are we convinced of Jesus' words, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me**". (Jn. 14:6) or when he says "**whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son.**" (Jn.3:18) They together with his directive of the Great Commission indicate we cannot assume people are going to go to heaven apart from Christ. We don't want to be guilty of "functional universalism" in which we say we believe that people who don't know Christ are lost and then function as though they're somehow all going to get to heaven on their own without any attempt on our part to make sure they have the gospel. If that were true, why would Jesus have instructed his disciples to go into all the world.

The need for getting out the Gospel is as great as it has ever been. Never, to anyone's knowledge, has the world had such a vast mission field. The world's population is over 7 billion and is screaming for mission attention. It took from the time of Christ to the beginning of the 20th century to reach 1.6 billion in population. In the 20th century, in spite of two world wars, the world's populace took a quantum leap of over 4.5 billion people. Today the population of planet earth stands at 7 billion people. If all of those people were put in a single file row, it would circle the equator over 100 times. It is a veritable ocean of humanity, but each soul in this

ocean is a soul created by God, a soul for whom Christ died. No longer are we under the illusion that we can reach the world's millions with American missionaries. We send teams of 5 – 7 missionaries over to a country and set up a bible institute and seminary and train the nationals to reach their own countrymen and that seems to be working very well, but even at that we have far more requests for help than the ability to answer them.

God will not allow us to forget those of other nations and other cultures even if we are inclined to do so, in recent decades he has brought the nations of the earth into our own neighborhoods, laying them like Lazaruses at our gate. Our own nation also cries out for mission activity. Living as we are in a country whose values have been eroded by aggressive forces promoting humanism, materialism and hedonism, the church can no longer afford to sit back and be reactive to events around it. The time in the world's history may be later than we think, the cause is urgent. Our Synod so privileged, so blessed by God, is being called upon to use its God-given resources of a pure Word, well-trained ministers and teachers, lay talents and monetary wealth for the soul-saving purposes for which they were given. There is a growing awareness in our church body that at the core of the mission of the church is the work of missions. The closer we get to the heart of Jesus, the more we will want to share in his mission of seeking and saving the lost.

We have to be careful that we don't only think of mission work as something that's being done by missionaries for us. God wants us all to be in tune with His mission. Life's highway is littered with the wounded. There are those who are economically wounded, those who are physically wounded, those who are emotionally wounded, those who have wounded themselves by making the wrong choices in life. Above all there are the spiritually wounded filled with guilt, afraid of death, unsure of what life is all about. Some of them exist right under our noses in our own families, some are among those who enter and exit our lives in the course of our day-to-day work, some wait in the shadows hoping that we will notice them and help them. Some we hear about second hand. Some are across town, some are across

the country and then some are across the ocean on the other side of the world. One thing is sure, without the message of salvation we cannot assume they have hope and life eternal.

If we take an honest look at the overwhelming mission of the church, which is to disciple every nation, every person on earth, the sheer enormity of the task might cause many to throw up their hands and despair. Yet the Lord doesn't expect us to do it all by tomorrow, only to do our best each day. He gives us life on the installment plan, a day, a week, a month at a time and as we commit ourselves faithfully each day to the task he has before us we get much more done than we think. Yet too many of God's people have forgotten who they are-how special they are, how needed they are to be different, to be shining lights in this dark world. People will take note if you don't use profanities, if you have a good work ethic, if you are honest in your dealings, if you mention the Lord as the source of your blessings. They are particularly impressed when this becomes the pattern of our lives over months and years. To such people others in crisis will turn in their times of trouble. How can I relate to all of you that the pulpits from which you proclaim the Gospel are every bit as important and the ones from which it is proclaimed in church.

Now certainly you and I may have not been called in the same way as the 12 Apostles to leave our jobs for full-time service in the public ministry. Still, as Christian disciples, we have been called to be not merely mechanics, but mechanics who have a soul-winning purpose. Not only teachers and nurses, but men and women who have been placed in a unique position to touch lives and lead them, even if it be ever so indirectly, in the direction of Jesus. You're not merely fathers and mothers bringing home the bacon and putting the meals on the table, you're people who are in a position to shape the mindset of future generations and show them how they can be part of the great mission too. You're not only employers, managers and supervisors, you're men and women who have it within your power to help people grow. You are not merely members of Peace Lutheran in Hartford, but rather important soldiers in the vast army known as the Christian church. Your

efforts combined with those of other Christians in our synod's 1200 churches can accomplish together what we cannot do individually, namely to support the work of over 37 overseas missionaries in 23 and scores of missionaries in the U.S. and Canada. God hasn't asked us to die for others; his son has already done that. We don't even have to go in person to tell everyone on distant shores they have a savior; we have missionaries to do that for us. Yet we can go through our purse, our offerings that support their important work.

Yes, we are all part of the mission. We even know what it is. Our challenge is to keep focused on it right where God has placed us so that every day and in every way we continue to further his mission and help his Kingdom come. Amen.