

Mission at Lewinsville

October, 13 2024

Sermon:

One of the great privileges I have as associate pastor for Christian Formation at Lewinsville is the opportunity to work with the Mission and Service Ministry group. In my three years working with this congregation I have learned that Lewinsville has a rich history of mission work. The history of this congregation is one that has embodied its commitment to serving both the local and global community. Lewinsville has been a part of founding so many different ministries and programs and I often find myself in awe of all that has been accomplished throughout its history.

To name a few of the important missions in this congregation.... The Lewinsville Retirement Residence began in 1975....

The mission of The Lewinsville Retirement Residence is to provide a safe, secure, affordable, and aesthetically pleasing environment designed to compassionately meet the needs of older adults without regard to their racial, social, ethnic, political or religious backgrounds, thus contributing to their continued independence and dignity.

Another mission that I am well acquainted with is Summer Mission Project :) Summer Mission Project, which will embark on its 35th trip this summer (location and registration will be announced on Nov. 1st) But SMP will continue its legacy of hands-on service in various communities throughout our country.

More recently this congregation moved quickly to respond to the Afghan Refugee Crisis in 2021. Shortly after I arrived at Lewinsville, our congregation launched the Refugee Resettlement Team, this team works in partnership with Lutheran Social Services to support refugees seeking safety and new beginnings in Northern Virginia. The RRT is about the work of extending the church's mission to welcome and care for those in need. Each of these initiatives reflects Lewinsville's deep commitment to witnessing God's love through tangible acts of service and compassion.

Many years ago when I was in seminary I had the opportunity to learn from Dr. Darrell Guder- who at the time was a professor of theology. Dr. Guder is well known for his theological work concerning missionary or said more plainly the mission of the church.... Or said another way, Dr. Guder's life work is calling the church to see itself as missional- meaning that to be a church means to have a missional presence in the world. There is no church without mission.

As a student of Dr. Guder I was shaped and formed to see church and mission as two sides of the same coin. I am convinced that the life of a Christian is

not merely an internal, personal spiritual journey but rather all Christians are called to a vocation of public witness- meaning followers of Christ are called and sent to be a living embodiment of grace and truth in the world. Dr. Guder argued that every church must reclaim this centrality of mission, and that the Church's main purpose in this world is to be sent to serve God's purposes for the healing and restoration of the world.

Karl Barth described the rhythm of the church's life as inhaling and exhaling. The gathered life of the church (is the inhale), the inhale is when believers come together in worship, fellowship, and formation.... But the inhale is meant to prepare and equip us for the sent life (the exhale), When we exhale.... where we are sent out into the world as laborers in the kingdom of God. As with breathing.... Exhaling is not optional..... The being sent out into the world is not an optional activity or a small subset of the church's work, but it is (as Dr. Guder taught) central to the church's identity and purpose.

our gospel reading today at first glance would seem to have nothing to do with mission. In truth this scripture reading is more likely to go in the category of text to skip over....

In preparing for today's sermon, I was listening to a lectionary podcast about our Gospel reading in which one of its host stated... When you read the gospel of Mark for 10 chapters you are longing for Jesus to talk more and say more about the kingdom of God... but then you get to chapter 10 and Jesus starts talking and you immediately want him to stop talking!" Our gospel text today, often titled as the Rich Young Ruler- is a tough text for anyone to read and it is especially tough for middle class americans.... Because the story of the rich young ruler is often reduced as a warning about the accumulation of wealth- and the most remembered line is about a camel and the eye of a needle.... As an individual with a savings account, and mortgage, and who very much likes the safety and security my possessions give to me ... I find this text challenging. This week after Wednesday bible study Adrian Steel and I were discussing the Mark passage to which Adrian stated "I will be happy to let go of all my possessions.... When I die and go to heaven"

The Gospel of Mark tells us that A young man approaches Jesus, asking, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This man wants to learn from Jesus how he can earn salvation, believing that his moral achievements and adherence to the law can earn him eternal life. Jesus, knowing the man's heart, doesn't immediately correct him. Instead, Jesus affirms the importance of the commandments and invites the man to reflect on his life.

The man asserts that he has kept all these commandments since his youth. And then there is what I think is the most important moment in the story:

Verse 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him

Jesus loves this man and from that love, Jesus invites him to join and participate in the Kingdom of God on earth.... He asks him to “go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and follow me.”

Verse 22 tells us about the young man “When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions”

This story gets confusing if we connect this man's salvation with his unwillingness to do what Jesus asks of him.... I think that is a misunderstanding of the text. Jesus' instruction is not given so that the man might earn salvation through sacrifice, but rather Jesus gave this man an invitation to participate fully in the mission of God's kingdom here on earth. Jesus is calling this man to step away from his attachment to his wealth, so that he can experience freedom from worldly possessions, and to live the life of radical discipleship. Jesus is inviting him into the work of God's kingdom, to trust in God rather than in his wealth.

But the man leaves sorrowful. Why? Not because Jesus rejected him or denied him mercy—Jesus loves this man and Jesus' love is not conditional on his worthiness. Rather, the man is sorrowful because he can't let go of his wealth. He chooses his riches over the invitation into the kingdom of God. This doesn't mean he is condemned or excluded from eternal life, but it does show that power, wealth and material security can get in the way of experiencing all that Jesus might have for us in this life.

For all of us, this story prompts reflection. What are our own internal barriers to joining Jesus' mission in this world? Are we, like this young man, clinging to something that causes us to miss out? Do we turn away sorrowful when Jesus invites us to transformation?

In this story, Jesus is showing that the barriers to following Him are often within our own hearts. The young ruler's riches were the barrier in his life, but for others, it might be something else—pride, comfort, status, or security. Jesus wasn't rejecting the rich young man, but He was lovingly inviting him to let go and step into something far greater: the kingdom of God.

To relate this story to what I learned from Dr. Guder many years ago... one way to view this story is that the Rich young ruler was asking Jesus.... What I can do for my personal, internal spiritual world... how do I make sure that I'm okay.... But Jesus invites the young man to not focus just on his own personal salvation and internal spiritual world- Jesus says... Join me in my mission in the world - let Go of this world's priorities and jump into the work of Jesus' alternative Kingdom.

Jesus didn't just call followers to be with him for their own benefit; rather he called them to join him bringing God's love, mercy, and grace outward to new people introducing God's community to more people. Said another way my relationship with Jesus is not just for me, it's not just for my own personal benefit. It is beneficial to

me but my relationship is for the purpose of sharing Christ's love with the world. And a Community that has let go, and joined the mission of Jesus... is a community marked by vulnerability. Relying not on its own strength but on the power of the Holy Spirit- For as Jesus said "With God, All things are possible.

According to Dr Guder, Being a missional church is a continuous journey of discovery, struggle, and growth, empowered by the Holy Spirit. It's not about adopting strategies or techniques, but about walking in new directions with repentance and a renewed sense of purpose. Mission is the Holy Spirit's mysterious and powerful work, leading the church out into God's redemptive mission for the world.

The author of our Hebrew's reading today:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,^[a] and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, **2** looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith...

Friends, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses....all those in the faith who have completed their life on earth and now live with God....and those who surround us in this congregation right now (and all those who are joining us in the virtual cloud!).... Lewinsville has been about the work of taking our mission in the world seriously.... And we are called to continue that race.

Like the rich young ruler, we too are being invited by Jesus to let go of anything that holds us back from fully joining in God's kingdom work. In the ruler's case, it was his attachment to wealth, but for us, it could be anything that keeps us from wholeheartedly embracing our call to bear witness to the world about the gift of salvation, love, and mercy through Jesus. The church is not just a gathered community focused inwardly but is called to "exhale" into the world, sending its members out as witnesses to God's redemptive mission. We, like the rich young ruler, are invited to move beyond personal security and comfort, participating in the mission of God by proclaiming and living out the gospel in our communities, becoming part of the ongoing witness of the church that exists for the sake of the world.

Let us Pray:

Gracious and Loving God,

We come before You with humble hearts, acknowledging the many ways You have called us to join in Your mission of love and redemption. Yet, we confess that there are things in our lives—our fears, attachments, comforts—that hold us back from fully participating in the work of Your kingdom. We ask for Your grace to let go of anything that stands in the way of our witness. Help us release our burdens, our doubts, and our reluctance, so that we may exhale Your love into the world with

boldness and faith. Equip us, O Lord, to be Your hands and feet, proclaiming Your mercy, sharing Your hope, and embodying Your truth wherever You send us. As we breathe in Your Spirit, may we exhale Your mission, always pointing to the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. In His holy name we pray. Amen.