

Preached Sermon Text

Name: Christoph Lameter

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Title: Paul's Farewell

Text: Acts 20:17-27

Theme: How to do Mission

Purpose: Show that mission is not only calling people to a decision or social work. Mission is a task that affects all areas of life.

1. Reading of Scripture

Hear the word of God as given to us by Luke in the book of Acts. I am reading from the 20th chapter starting at verse 17 to 27:

17 From Miletus he[**Paul**] sent a message to Ephesus, asking the *elders* of the church to meet him.

18 When they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how *I lived among you* the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews.

20 *I did not shrink from doing anything helpful[**useful**],* proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about *repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus.*

22 And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,

23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me.

24 But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to *testify to the good news of God's grace.*

25 "And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again.

26 Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you,

27 for *I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose[**plan,intentions**] of God.*

2. Mission is

2.1. *Decision making?*

I remember vividly the time when I became a Christian and when I was very zealous for the Lord. I had more enthusiasm than wisdom, I was on fire for God! All this living in the faith was very new to me and the church where I was at - the Matthaues-Gemeinde - was very engaged in mission.

Mission was converting others to become Christians.

Mission was the topic almost whenever we met.

Mission was to which everything what we did was dedicated.

Mission was the purpose of being a Christian.

I wanted to do the will of God and experience God and therefore I took part in Missionary Vacations. We would go to other Lutheran Churches in Germany and hold Mission Rallies. They usually lasted one or two weeks with daily evening services held by our Pastor Mueller, who was quite famous for this because he had done it for a number of years. We would walk around the parish and try to systematically talk to all people about the Christian Faith or invite them to the evening services.

That was hard door to door work! Boy, it took a lot of courage to knock on somebody's door whom you did not know and try to talk with them about the faith. But we thought that we had to do it for the Lord and so we did it.

No one really liked the Door-to-Door part especially since we rarely had any positive reactions. Most people just wanted to get rid of us.[*Joke Pause*]

Some people came anyway to our meetings in the evening but they were mostly invited through personal connections of the members of the church and the message each night was quite simple. Decide to follow Jesus! That was the message and Pastor Mueller - our pastor - would preach that message in a very convincing way.

People would come to us after the service to make their "Decision" and we would pray with them to start a new life. We would count the heads we had hunted each day to measure our success.

Mission was to have people make a decision for Jesus!

Sadly we were always gone in just a few days so I could never observe what happened afterwards. We always assumed that the churches grew tremendously

through our Missionary Campaigns. That is until we did one of those campaigns for our own church in our own area.

Two weeks of daily missionary meetings with well trained Evangelists and hundreds of people made decisions for Jesus, [*Pause*] but surprisingly only a handful people showed up afterwards in our churches! [*Pause*]

At that point I began to wonder: Is that really what mission should be all about? Just decide for Jesus and you are saved? Most people just did “decide” and then they got over it as soon as possible! [*Joke Pause*]

After we came to Fuller, I talked with someone who was responsible for the big evangelistic campaigns of Billy Graham in Pasadena. He got all these thousand of decision-cards and when he tried to find out what happened to them afterwards he was not even able to contact a handful of them!

Is that what mission should be? Is mission just *making a decision for Jesus*? Just fill out one of those forms of Billy Graham and you are admitted into heaven, right?

2.2. Help the poor and needy?

Another example of Mission. There is a hospital that is build far away in Zimbabwe Africa by the German Lutheran Church. Money is flowing into it by people giving to Mission. Mission is helping the poor and the needy. Mission is performing a service for free to those that cannot afford it otherwise.

Is Mission is funding relief agencies? Is mission just to do good to others? Is Mission a service to society?

2.3. Causing a life change

Mission in a Christian sense has always been understood as spreading the news of the Gospel to those that do not believe in Christ. Missions aim is clearly at conversion to Christianity of those that do not believe. But what kind of conversion? We get clarity on Mission by listening to the command that God gave to Paul when the Lord said to Paul:

Acts 26:17b-18: I am sending you [*Paul*] to open their [*the unbelievers*] eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me!

Mission is to be an agent of God. We are sent with a mission from God. An agent that makes people to turn away from evil, from darkness, from Satan, to do good, to live in the light, to follow God.

Mission is more than just having people fill out decision cards, and also more than helping the needy.

Mission is bringing about in others a new life, a new creation, renewing a person. Mission is concerned with faith and spirituality!

Paul expresses it in 2 Cor 5:17 [This verse was given to me at my baptism]

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!

3. How to do Mission?

Bringing about new life. It sounds so great and I am sure we are all now depressed that we do not know how to do it. How can we - who are so sinful - attempt to do such things as changing others? That is only possible through the grace and through the spirit of God. The passage of Scripture for today will help us to see how the Holy Spirit worked through Paul in doing Mission.

In Acts 20 Paul has finished evangelizing a part of the Roman Empire. Here in Acts 20 is the final good-bye to the elders of the churches that were founded in his Mission to this part of the Roman Empire. Paul has finished his missionary activities and in his final Farewell address Paul tells the elders what he did and reminds them to continue in the same work. He brings out step by step how Mission works. You will see that his approach to missions is very different from those mentioned above.

Paul was the great Missionary of the apostolic age, here we can listen to his experiences. How did he do it? Let us copy all we can for this day and this age!

3.1. *Being a witness to others.*

The first item on Paul's lists is he himself. He says:

You know how I lived among you (Acts 20:18 par.)

Paul himself is the big example for the others. His own being as a Christian is the basis on which he can conduct mission. His own behavior, his conduct of life is an example for others to follow. Paul knows God, is guided by him through prayer

and the study of God's word. Mission works through personal contact and through imitation especially in the beginning stages. The people in the Roman Empire saw that there was something different in the person of Paul, something of God. They wanted it too and so they did what Paul did. He was evidence of the Joy and Power of God, a life that they wanted too.

You, being a Christian and living the Christian life in a daily way, are the biggest and most important tool for Mission. Spending time with God in prayer and with God's word is most important for living the Christian life. Doing according to God's will, which is evident through his word to you personally, will show others of the Christ that is in you. Being a witness means not being perfect - God is forgiving - but having integrity and authenticity. Our words must not be different from the things we do. And being authentic means having a working knowledge of God's word and of God's will. You need to regularly study the Bible and Pray! Christianity is not a game but a life-changing commitment to the truth of God's message. This commitment was evident in Paul.

Most people whose story of becoming a Christian I know have become Christians through *personal relationships* with other Christians. That is the same for me. When I first saw Christians and took part of their fellowship, I saw that there was something different, something giving healing to my life, something renewing life. From that point on I was hooked. I noticed that others came to our Church in Germany the same way. Through personal relationships and not through our great Missionary campaigns!

3.2. Proclamation of the good news

And besides his personal example as a Christian, Paul also talked about very important issues. He says:

I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:20-21).

Apart from being a Christian there needs to be a proclamation, a making public of the Christian message of the good news of the grace of God. There needs to be a teaching what the will of God is!

Paul did something dangerous, something he could have "shrunk back" from! He taught about repentance and faith. How can that be dangerous? Today we

usually only talk about faith, but repentance comes before faith. What is repentance? Repentance means to regret past behavior, find yourself as guilty before God and make a change for the better! There cannot be a regret, no change for the better if people do not accept that what they have done is wrong and evil. There is no repentance if people do not see themselves as deserving punishment from God because of the horrible things they have done.

Talking about repentance therefore involves showing people that they are evil and under the judgment of God. Not a very easy thing to do!

And quite contrary to the code of nice behavior around here! [*Joke Pause*]

Repentance is a very offensive part of the Gospel! No one will object if you just talk about the grace of God, how nice he is, how forgiving and how much our God loves us. But talk about evil, about our sins, about the need for repentance and people feel accused, they get mad at you and many will hate you.

But this is part of the proclamation of the Gospel, of the good news. Repentance means accepting that we have done evil, accepting that we are responsible for our actions! Then God will forgive us in his mercy and accept us as children of God.

The second part of his teaching was on faith. Faith is the trust in God, trust in his forgiveness and trust that he will lead our lives the right way. It means acting according to what God says to us how we should behave because we trust him that his word is true. We do not decide for ourselves what is good and evil but we depend on God to tell us what is good and evil. We trust God and live according to his will.

3.3. Teaching the whole intentions of God

Paul continued even when they were already Christians in talking with them about uncomfortable issues. He says:

I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole intentions of God (Acts 20:27)

Paul did not shrink back from telling them everything even after they had become Christians. He again did not only tell them what they liked, but even those things that did not well suit them. He taught them the complete will of God. He left nothing out. He even taught them the politically incorrect teachings! Paul encourages people in faith, but he also corrects them, confronts them if their

conduct was against the “intentions of God”. He build a foundation of Christian life for them.

Mission in this way can only be done through very tight relationships, through honesty with each other, through being dedicated to the same task, through complete willingness to obey and follow God. Mission means to instruct and teach all the intentions of God.

At this point also the hospital in Zimbabwe fits in. A hospital like that is an declaration of our mercy and care for others, it is an expression of our Christian love, but it is not primarily a missionary enterprise because its aim is not bringing people to the Christian faith. A hospital is a good witness of our willingness to do good to others. But the call to repentance and the teaching of all of the intentions of God is lacking. Mission must always include all aspects of life. We cannot separate doing good from talking about the message of the Gospel.

4. Conclusion: Mission an expression of life

What is mission? Mission is bringing people to faith, bringing them from darkness of sin into the light of God. That is done by

- First Being an authentic Christian in fellowship with God and others.
- Second Proclamation of the need for repentance and of faith.
- Third Teaching the complete intentions of God.

Mission is only possible by close relationships to others.
Relationships in which all of these three points work together
Being,
Proclamation
and Teaching.

Relationships that are strong allowing us to correct others and that allow others to correct us.

Mission is a task that demands our whole being, our whole life. And finally mission is a natural expression of the life of a Christian.

Amen.