

Augusta First Baptist Church of Augusta
2 Corinthians 5:16-21
It's Time...To be Missional
November 4, 2007
It's Time...A Journey Towards Missional Faithfulness

NRS 2 Corinthians 5:16 *“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

I have done quite a bit of speaking about being a missional church, but in fairness, I have not clearly defined what I mean by it. Even last week, I confessed to you that the word missional, is technically not a word at all. “Missional,” it has been said, is an adjective to describe the kind of church we believe God desires, and that Jesus envisioned.

Missional implies that we are a people and a church on the move. This is what I believe, Paul meant, when he wrote to the Corinthians and said, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”* (v. 17).

What I find so interesting is how God has wired the universe, and because of this, I believe in the watchful and present gaze of God upon our lives, every day, every moment. I believe that deep within each of us is the gentle glow of God seeking to draw us closer, illuminate our vision, and set fire to our imagination.

According to physicists, who study thermodynamics, a small imbalance – or shall we say movement – in the early universe resulted in a cosmos of some 50 billion galaxies and a habitable planet earth. From the very beginning, God has planted a will to become, to be, and to live, and this is found in a microscopic, molecular level. Imagine what God is willing in us, both as individuals and in this church.

Dr. James Flamming, a fellow pastor, wrote recently: God has been at work, all right, but, it hasn't been about planning, but about the hearts of people. It hasn't been about the church. It has been about you. It hasn't been about the future. It has been about now. It hasn't been about dates on the calendar, but about disciples on a spiritual journey.

*“Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. **It's bursting out!** Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands.”* (from The Message, Isaiah 43:18-19)

God wants to do something new, but it cannot be commodified, quantified, planned, or scheduled.

Steven Covey, author of numerous books on organizational behavior, writes in his best-selling book, First Things First, “that our culture is obsessed with the clock and busyness, and work commitments, appointments, tasks and schedules. The clock becomes a symbol of our very lives.” Consider how this very day has been affected because of the end of Daylight Savings Time. It is all about time, to be sure, but the wrong kind of time.

Coveys suggest that we consider a different symbol – a compass. A compass represents things like personal vision, values, and principles that shape and guide our lives. “Relying more on the compass than the clock,” Covey suggests, “means that life has more to do with the direction we intend to follow on our journey.”

Being a new creation means that the destination is not as important as the journey.

Make no mistake about it – church is not about programs, it is about people. It is not about busyness, it is about becoming. It is not about membership, it is about mission. And you know what? The same can be said about your life and mine.

Just imagine how one’s own life would be transformed if we really believed what physicists believe – that the cosmos is on the move. Theologically, our affirmation would be that of Paul’s – God is making a new creation out of us. Yet, I am troubled that so many of us seem to live out our lives in practical atheism. We stumble out of bed, eat meals that we forget about, oftentimes, with people we forget about, and work jobs we would rather forget about, hoping that we can just survive the day.

I wonder if any of this sounds familiar? I wonder if any of us actually believe that this is what God intends in our life? Furthermore, I wonder if this is also what we expect of the church– this church– just to survive. Congratulations, we say, we have survived 190 years. Well, I say so what. I don’t want to just survive in my life, and neither do I want this for the church. I take Paul’s words to heart: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Indeed it is so.

The missional journey, both as a church and as individuals, is rarely, if ever, a strait line. Like ancient Israel, that was found wandering for forty years through forsaken wilderness, God speaks and teaches in the journey. Astronomers tell us that the essential creation of the cosmos occurred in less than a micro second (something like 10 to the negative 43^{rd} power) and yet, this universe has been on the move for nearly 15 or so billion years. Somehow, we think that God has to do our bidding now. Like children riding in the back seat of the mini van, we are asking, “Are we there yet?”

Instead of asking “Am I there yet, God?” how about asking compass questions like, “Am I heading in the right way? Are my values where they need to be? Where are my principles? Where am I placing my trust, my faith?”

Of course, this is precisely the kind of questions we need to be asking as a church. In Paul's letter he says this because we are new creations, and so, we have a life mission to do. In verse 18, Paul writes that as a new creation, we are to be about: ...the ministry of reconciliation. We are reconciled with God, therefore we are to be the body of Christ amidst a broken world and do the work of reconciliation.

Several years ago many of us picked up and read Rick Warren's, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Rick champions the idea that we were "saved to serve." God did not save us through the death of his Son so we could "sit, soak, and sour" in church. He saved us so we could be on mission. Paul uses the phrase, "entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (v.19b).

What does this mean? It means living in such a way that we become agents – Paul would use the word ambassadors – of welcoming and healing. It means connecting people with the One who wants to do a new work in each of us.

We, the body of Christ, have been entrusted with this task. The government cannot do this. Legislation cannot do this. Schools, businesses, civic or charitable organizations cannot do this. It is up to us!

The message of reconciliation, doing the ministry of reconciliation, implies that we must be where the people are. Like Jesus, at Jacob's well, where he encountered the Samaritan woman, we the church, must go where the people are who look different, act different, behave different, even believe different.

Somehow, we have this misleading assumption that if we just tell everybody else what they are doing wrong, that they will just change. Oh, really? Perhaps, we need to catch up with Jesus at the well and be where the people are gathering.

I read recently that in the next twenty-five years there will be more non-white Americans than white Americans, and that the majority of these people will be Asian and Hispanic, not African-American. Do you know that already in the United States, there are more Muslims than Presbyterians? Do you see now why it's time to rethink and redesign our outreach and mission strategy? (from David Hughes, pastor of First Baptist Church of Winston-Salem).

We don't need to return to models that may have worked 20, 30 or more years ago. But neither should we sit around and do nothing. It's a compass thing – finding out where we are and orienting ourselves in the right direction.

The question is not about asking how we can get more African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, college kids, single adults, or whatever happens to be our favorite group. The question we need to be asking is, how we can plant ourselves for ministry among the "Samaritans" that surround 3500 Walton Way. We join others at the well, not because we want more members, but because we want to see God's family grow here and beyond.

God wants to do something new in you and in us. God is calling us to the well where the action is. Shall we go?

All during our history, people have come to the well and have lived their lives in such a way to bring others to the well that we so freely drink from today. At this point in our worship, let us take time to thank God for the servants who have gone before us and are now gone from our midst but present in God's gaze.