

**Haydenville Congregational Church**  
**The Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian**  
**January 24, 2010**  
**Luke 4:14-21**

**“Jesus’ Mission Statement”**

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts  
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer. Amen.*

Some fifteen hearty souls—members and friends of our church family—have been gathering on Wednesday evenings in Gloria Ayvazian’s beautiful living room, by a roaring fire, for Home Church to study the Lord’s Prayer. On these cold, dark winter evenings, we have come together in a large circle made up of living room chairs, den chairs, and dining room chairs with the text of the Lord’s Prayer in front of us and we have been studied the prayer line by line—probing the meaning of each word and phrase. What a rich exchange we have had in that cozy living room, what a lovely time of study and fellowship together.

It was in class #2 when we were up to the line, “...thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...” that I said that those words in the Lord’s Prayer are probably (in the opinion of many Biblical scholars) THE central phrase of the prayer. Theologian Tom Wright believes that those words—called “the kingdom announcement”—are the focal point of the prayer because they are the focal point of Jesus’ ministry. Those words capture Jesus’ own commitment to “living the kingdom” while he was on earth. Bringing the kingdom of God to earth—causing, creating the inbreaking of the kingdom of God on earth—was Jesus’ great task.

Our discussion of those few words...“thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...” led us to question: if living the kingdom of God on earth was Jesus’ main work, how did he do that? What guided his daily life? That discussion led us to the Biblical passage that is sometimes referred to as “Jesus’ personal mission statement.” It is embedded in the Scripture reading for today. Listen again to Luke 4:18-19

*When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the  
synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,<sup>17</sup> and the  
scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.*

*He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

Preaching the gospel, reaching out to the poor and the captives, bringing healing and freedom, proclaiming the truth about God: these were what Jesus believed he was on earth to accomplish.

These words, sometimes called Jesus' personal mission statement, are from his own tradition...these words are from the Hebrew Scriptures. Luke's version of what we are calling Jesus' mission statement, the words Jesus read in the synagogue, are from Jesus' tradition as a Jew. In the story in Luke, Jesus is reading from the Book of Isaiah, however in the Luke version, the passage has been changed, but only subtly.

Listen to the actual passage from the Book of Isaiah that Jesus is said to have read,

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.  
Isaiah 61:1-2*

Powerful words from the Book of Isaiah that seem to have guided Jesus' life. Powerful words that informed, shaped and guided his ministry.

This week in our Tuesday Clergy Bible Study group we were talking about the passage from the Book of Isaiah and Jesus words as reported in Luke and how both versions are so powerful and meaningful and the Rev. Michael Stotts, Pastor of Christ United Methodist Church on Route 66 in Northampton, told us this story....

Pastor Mike's father was a Professor at Boston University School of Theology. Mike, who was born in 1946, grew up running around the BU School of Theology. From the time he could walk, Mike was brought to the school with his Dad and

allowed to wander around the halls near his Dad's office. Mike remembers particularly when he was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, running up and down the stairs of the building and stopping to stare at a stained glass window on one particular large landing. Mike could read by then and he would stop, stare and slowly read the words in the stained glass window:

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

Mike remembers that year, when he was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, because that year he was allowed to run farther from his Dad's office and so the big staircase was now permitted on his circuit and the big landing of great interest to him. The stained glass window with those words inscribed in it were compelling to the young Mike.

Apparently, Mike says, throughout his boyhood when at work with his Dad, he would stare at those words in the colored glass window on the landing. Then Mike grew up and as an adult he experienced a call to the ministry himself. In 1968, Mike enrolled in Boston University School of Theology. Now a grown man, he was a student in the place he had known all his life. And now as a seminarian, Mike often walked up that same staircase, and he would stop and read the words he had read as a child. And he pondered them. And he thought then that they WERE like Jesus' personal mission statement. Mike feels that those words that he grew up reading in the window became a sort of personal mission statement for HIS own life, those words have guided HIS life and his ministry.

The one long sentence in the Book of Isaiah, changed slightly and made into two sentences in Luke provide a remarkable vision for a life.

Jesus' time on earth was brief—he was killed at age 33.

And his personal mission statement is also brief, and yet it says so much.

If we consider the two sentences from today's reading in the Gospel of Luke, those words cover what Jesus felt he was called to do in his earthly life.

Two sentences that describe his calling and his work. Jesus' mission personal mission statement recognizes that God's spirit is upon him and he has been chosen, anointed to befriend the poor and tell them the good news—that the last shall be first and the first last, the meek shall inherit the earth, and the poor are especially blessed. It says that he is to work for the freedom of captives—we assume it

means those literally captive and those whose prisons are fear, pain, worry, isolation, loneliness, or poverty. His mission statement says that he is to aid in the recovery of sight to the blind—which probably means to literally heal those who are blind and to help those who can literally see but are blind to God’s presence to “see” or experience God before them.

Jesus’ personal mission statement says he is to let the oppressed go free...he is to commune with those on the margins, love and work with those who are oppressed and labor for their freedom. And to proclaim that such actions, such a time, will please the Lord.

Jesus’ personal mission statement is not long or fancy. But it covers the work that guided his life and consumed his days.

Reflecting on Jesus’ personal mission statement made me think about the process the Deacons and Trustees underwent last year when they created a mission statement for this Church.

Jesus’ personal mission statement includes powerful words: Spirit, anointed, good news, poor, release, captives, recovery, sight, blind, oppressed, free, Lord’s favor. A few words strung together with some powerful verbs that make those concepts come alive. A few powerful words that guided a life and gave shape to a ministry.

The Deacons and the Trustees tried to do the same: they tried to write a short statement that captured the mission of this Church—a few words that would convey both what we currently do and where we are heading in the future. Listen to the mission statement the Church Deacons and Trustees created over the course months of meetings in large and small groups...

*The Haydenville Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, is a dynamic, growing, diverse, and welcoming faith community. We are on a journey together to experience who God and Jesus are for us and our world.*

*We are deeply committed to love, service, justice, peace and care of the earth.*

Those three sentences (which you will vote on at our Annual Meeting in February) may become the mission statement for our church—reflecting in the same moment who we are already and who we hope to become.

Like Jesus’ mission statement, the proposed mission statement for the Church is loaded with powerful words and images: dynamic, growing, diverse, welcoming,

faith, community, journey, God, Jesus, world, love, service, justice, peace, care, earth.

Strong stuff in three short sentences.

All this reflecting on Jesus' personal mission statement and the proposed mission statement for our Church led me to wonder: what it would be like for me, for each one of us, to write a personal mission statement. What words or principles guide our lives? What words would we use to reflect both where we are and where we strive to be?

Wondering about those questions, I reached out to our Church Deacons and I asked them: what is your personal mission statement? Could you put the words that guide your individual life into one, two or three sentences?

Here are the responses I got:

Ellie Loomis wrote:

*My mission is to follow the teachings of Jesus to the best of my ability; to have an open heart, an open mind, and to help whenever I can and wherever I am needed.*

Donna Harlan wrote:

*To serve others with joy, grace and gratitude.*

Lisa Hall wrote:

*To be open-hearted with God, in every breath.*

Shirley Warner wrote that the words that guide her life are:

*Love each other; believe in people; find the laughter; know that miracles happen and faith is hope.*

The words that guide Diane Scott's life are from the Book of Hebrews, Ch. 12:

*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.*

And Bonnie Atkins wrote:

*My work is to see that which is right here, to recognize and to connect with what is sacred and to help others honor presence.*

What did you hear in these mission statements? What are the central words?

Follow Jesus, open heart, open mind,

Help, serve, joy, grace, gratitude,  
God, breath, love, believe,  
Laughter, miracles, faith,  
Run, endurance, Jesus  
See, here, recognize, connect,  
Sacred, honor, presence.

Beautiful words, inspiring words, powerful words.  
Words that can guide a life, shape a ministry.

Once I received these responses from some of the Deacons I asked myself:  
What would I write? What one, two or three sentences could I create that would  
summarize where I am and where I am headed? I tried and found this to be a  
difficult task.

Here is what I finally settled on although I feel it certainly could be improved...

*My work is to love God and all my brothers and sisters with all my heart, to  
strengthen community through acts of service, to reach for those on the margins of  
power, to practice radical hospitality and inclusion, and to wed justice with peace.*

What would you write? What words or phrases would you include in your  
personal mission statement? What is central to your life? What guides your life?

My dear sisters and brothers, we look to Jesus as our model and our guide. Every  
Sunday when we are together and every day on our own, we look to Jesus as our  
model and our guide. And so we pause to reflect on and be inspired by the story in  
the Gospel of Luke that tells us that one day when Jesus went to Nazareth where he  
had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath as was his custom.  
When he stood up to read, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.  
Jesus unrolled the scroll and said:

*‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’*

Then, according to the story in Luke, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the  
attendant, sat down and said, “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled...*”

Amen.