

Sunday 15 2010C

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

July 11, 2010

Occasional

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Our congregation has a strategic planning group called the Vision Team. It has been working for about a year to develop a strategic plan for our congregation. A strategic plan that will guide our work, our mission, for about three years.

We have had a lot of input. Every time we have asked for your participation, we have had 80 to 100 people respond. Not always the same 80, either. The grocery list of ideas that you have suggested is seven and a half pages long, single spaced. And it shouldn't be surprising that out of dozens of conversations, and thousands of pieces of paper– it shouldn't be surprising that the theme we kept hearing was "Grace." What we have here is Grace. And what we can give the world– that is does not have– is Grace.

[You can see that on this yellow sheet I've printed for you this morning.](#) The new mission statement, in a deceptively simple way, says: *The Holy Spirit gathers us into a community that enthusiastically claims and shares our experience of God's Grace.* Although the word Grace is not conventionally capitalized, the Vision Team has capitalized it because it is the active power in this congregation. And this deceptively simple mission statement recognizes that although Grace is always the same, and is always what this congregation, and indeed what the whole Church is all about– the ways in which we experience Grace are many. And the mission statement invites us to claim our experiences of Grace enthusiastically. And it invites us to share our experiences of Grace enthusiastically.

And HOW do we claim and share God's Grace? Well, the Vision Team has given us eight ways. Now, a plan with specific goals is in the works right now. It is going to be very specific and very flexible, and therefore very long, and few of you will ever read it. But this set of principles, on this yellow sheet, is fundamentally about Grace. And a key word on this page, which has a tiny circle around it– a key word on this page is *practice*. Athletes practice. Musicians practice. A lawyer, we say, has a legal practice. A doctor, we say, practices medicine. This Church, we hope, is going to *practice* claiming and sharing Grace. *Enthusiastically* claiming and sharing Grace. And we're going to practice in eight areas. Eight fields.

"What is your field?" one doctor will ask another. My field is dermatology. Her field is oncology. The field where you practice. The field of your expertise. Usually, mission field means the pagans, or the youths, or the aborigines. And in that sense, the whole world is our mission field. But in these eight areas, we practice. We deliberately get out of bed in the morning, we put in our hours on the basketball court, or sitting at the piano, because this is what we're good at. This is who we are. And this is what we're going to get REAL good at. These are the things that Dove of Peace is going

to be known for.

This morning, for a moment, I want to talk to you about our third mission field, the practice of ecumenism, of being ecumenical. Ecumenical is that big churchy word that tries to combine two Greek words. It means the whole Christian church on earth. *We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.* A lower-case “c” in catholic. Or, *One Christian church.*

An ecumenical church does not claim to have a monopoly on the truth. We don’t claim to be the only ticket to heaven. To be God’s Church and to serve all the people on this earth, we need Pentecostals. We need Episcopalians. We need the Coptic Church of Egypt. In order to be whole. And ecumenical means, we can be Lutheran. We don’t need to be all things to all people. The Holy Spirit has already provided many forms of Christianity. So we don’t have to homogenize everybody into uniformity. We can be diverse, because we are one in Christ.

These eight mission fields more or less had to meet three criteria. First of all, is it faithful and is it rooted in the truth. That’s the first criterion. Is it biblical? Is it something Jesus would do, or would ask his disciples to do? And second, is it something that Dove of Peace already has in its toolbox. Is it part of who we are already? Does Dove of Peace know a thing or two about this kind of work? And third, if Dove of Peace got better at this particular field— by intentional practice— would we be serving the world? Would we be a blessing to others? Would our congregation be speaking to the real world of the 21st century?

Well, of course, ecumenism meets the criterion of truth and faithfulness. It is Jesus, who, when his disciples saw someone else doing miracles in Jesus’ name, it is Jesus who said, “*Whoever is not against us is for us.*” It is Jesus, who, on the night of his arrest, prayed for the unity of his disciples. It is Paul who said that the Church is the Body of Christ, and that we can’t all be eyeballs. The Body needs feet and hands, not just eyeballs. We can’t all be mega-churches. The first church had twelve members. No property. And no money. We can’t all be mega-churches, we can’t all be eyeballs, Paul said. This is ecumenism. The eyeballs need the feet, and the feet need the eyeballs.

So, yes, ecumenism is faithful. It’s a command of Jesus. It’s also foundational for Lutherans. Our core theological document, our core statement of Lutheran belief, is called the Augsburg Confession. And why was the Augsburg Confession written? It was written to build church identify. It was written to affirm the things we have in common, even when we can’t resolve our differences. Our denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is the most ecumenical church on earth. We have dialog with every major form of Christianity, and we have various levels of partnership with each kind. We are the connecting point for all kinds of Christians who won’t talk to one another. So, yes, the field of ecumenism is faithful, and biblical, and Lutheran, and true to the Spirit of Christ. That’s the first criterion.

The second criterion is whether this is something Dove of Peace knows something about. Is this already in our toolbox? Why, yes, it is. We don’t hesitate to partner with other Christians to get things done. I’m not even going to list all of the works of service and all of the ways that we do those things with others. Our ecumenical work with other faith communities is something that God

blessees with a huge multiplier effect. Furthermore, as we shared together in the last year, we learned that many of our members, maybe most of our members, were not raised as Lutherans. Including this pastor. We've come to Dove of Peace from many backgrounds, many directions. And this wholeness that we have here is a powerful testimony to the Lutheran theology which compels us, and it is a powerful testimony that the Holy Spirit is at work everywhere, not just in Lutheran churches. So that's the second criterion. Is this something that Dove knows one or two things about? Is this a gift that God has given us? Yes, it is.

Which brings us to the third criterion. If we get better at this... If we apply ourselves to this... If we focus on this ecumenism.... If we *practice* the gift that the Spirit has given us, can we be a blessing to the world of the 21st century?

And here again the answer is "You betcha!" Let's start with our culture. Which is polarized and divided. Everyone faction is suspicious of every other faction. People are sick and tired of it. And the churches are succumbing to this, left and right. Churches are divided internally, and they fight with each other.

Which brings us to young people. Their skepticism of organized religion keeps them away from church. They don't understand that Dove of Peace is different from Pat Robertson. They see a world in which Shiites and Sunnis are bombing each other, and it's not too hard to imagine Christians bombing each other— which in fact, we were doing in Ireland up until a few years ago. The Christian label, the Christian brand, is in trouble. And it's up to congregations like Dove of Peace to offer another point of view to future generations. That Christians can be united in the essentials, and divided in the non-essentials. That we can be rich in diversity, without sacrificing our core beliefs.

So can we practice this? Can we get better at it? Will we practice this? Are we serious about being a church that people can look to for hope and for intelligence and yes... for Grace in the decades to come. The Vision Team thinks so. This is one of eight fields that will be fleshed out into specifics in the Strategic Plan which is coming out in the fall. Next week, I'm going to talk about number four. Creation. And there is more to say, to share, to learn, and to hear, on all of this as we move forward. As we celebrate the Grace that the Holy Spirit has brought us here to experience. Amen.