

5 Adaptive Muscles

#2 Discerning Purpose Worship Resources

Recommended Scriptures

Luke 4:14-30

Many have referred to Jesus quoting the book of Isaiah as his mission statement or purpose.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5/ Mark 12:30-31

In many ways, the injunction to love God and neighbor knits together much of the story of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

Acts 1:8

The commission to the community of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit comes on them, shows a progression moving geographically and culturally outward.

Matthew 25:31-46

The parable of the sheep and the goats provides some direction for how we engage the world.

Proverbs 29:18-19

Translations translate this differently but the idea is that we need vision/revelation/guidance.

Matthew 28:16-20

The Great Commission

1 Samuel 3

God calling of Samuel who does not recognize it is the voice of God.

Isaiah 6

God calls Isaiah who responds, "Here am I, Send me."

1 Corinthians 12

The metaphor of the body shows that each person has value and purpose.

Key Themes, Definitions, Theological Ideas

Are we living out of our self-appointed preferences, or God's purpose for us?

What is the difference God is calling us to make now?

Vision-Mission-Values – a common practice adapted from the business world in thinking about discerning purpose. The vision statement provides insight into what the church hopes to achieve or become in the future. The mission statement communicates the purpose of the church. The values statement reflects the church's core principles and ethics.

Neighbor – a theme in the bible that generally relates to those in proximity or those who experience marginalization.

Key Themes, Definitions, Theological Ideas (cont.)

Discernment – a spiritual listening. Discernment comes to a greater understanding through the pursuit of the Holy Spirit’s voices for a particular season or matter.

The Voice of God – In the scriptures, the voice of God speaks through direct revelation, dreams, the wisdom of other people, and more.

Waiting on the Lord – There is an idea in the Christian tradition of waiting as a spiritual place. This theme regularly comes up in Advent. Waiting is not wasted time but a time of preparation. We wait on God because we need to be ready, our timing is not God’s timing, or God is preparing a purpose.

The Call of God – Many have interpreted purpose as feeling a direct calling from God. There are both callings for individuals and the church that are universal (see scriptures above). Also, some discern the direct voice of God speaking to them to direct an action or purpose.

The Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit is present and actively moving individuals and churches into purpose for today’s time and place.

Worship Resources (liturgy/hymns/songs/stories/poems, etc.)

Poems

Our Deepest Fears...
Maryann Williamson

Prayers

Wesleyan Covenant Prayer

Thomas Merton prayer

Hymns

“Here I Am Lord” UMH 593

“Send Me, Lord” UMH 497

“Wait for the Lord (Taize)” UMH 90

“Open My Eyes” UMH 454

Practices of Discerning Purpose



Quaker Clearness Committee

Clearness Committee is a structured approach to spiritual listening that aims to allow the person in discernment to discover their own path. It can be adapted for communal uses.

Fasting

Fasting for discernment is a time-honored practice in the Christian Faith Tradition.

Practices of Discerning Purpose

Listening Prayer

A practice of prayer that is expressly focused on hearing and discerning direction from the Holy Spirit.

Labyrinth



Labyrinth Locator



How to Make a Masking Tape Labyrinth

Shelley Walters Sermon Series



Shelley Walters took her church through C3 and adapted the work for the worshiping life of the church. All her sermons, including her one on Discerning Purpose, are available online.

Vision-Mission-Values work

Revisiting these essential organizational tools can help congregations focus on purpose. These are often the result of discernment not an avenue of discernment itself.

Sermon Outline

Text – Luke 4:14-20

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”[f]

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Sermon Outline (cont.)

Abstract

This sermon is designed to create space for reflection on purpose for a local church congregation. Too often church programs and rhythms can go on for years without reflection on the “why.” Exercising the muscle of purpose may bring up good questions that some have been wanting to ask and potentially threatening questions to others who may be averse to significant change. This message will act as a catalyst for permission-giving and further conversation on naming and acting within purpose.

Outline

I. Introduction

- a. Jesus’s purpose statement
 - i. Similar to his answer to John the Baptist’s disciples in Luke 7:22
 - ii. God is setting people free and the marginalized are at the center is what Jesus was doing. Time and time again we see this in Luke’s gospel
- b. Why talk about purpose in the church?
 - i. There is a thing called mission drift in business/nonprofit work – straying from an initial centralized purpose
 - ii. 2000 years since the Pentecost – some could argue there has been some church mission drift

II. Purpose vs. mission vs. vision vs. values

- a. What is the difference God is calling us to make now?
- b. How is Jesus intent on participating and bringing forth the Kingdom
- c. Some definitions
 - i. Purpose – the reason for which something is created
 - ii. Purposeful – showing determination and resolve
 - iii. What are we about as a church that is showing determination and resolve for what we are created for by the person of Jesus whose purpose was to illuminate God setting people free and the marginalized are at the center?
 - 1.Ok that is a lot!

III. Purpose points toward identity

- a. Tension – both of these things are true and can be true together
 - i. Being who we are
 1. Who God has already brought here
 2. What resources do we already have
 3. The place God has already put us

Sermon Outline (cont.)

- ii. Expanding our imagination
 - 1. The church in our time must be more nimble
 - 2. ... more connected to community
 - 3. ... more inclusive and welcoming
 - 4. ... more postured as learners

IV. Finding our purpose in Jesus's purpose

- a. Finding our purpose in who Jesus found his purpose
- b. Jesus's purpose attracted those Jesus put at the center
- c. Jesus's purpose was counter cultural and got him in trouble with those the culture put at the center - Jesus crossed cultural and religious boundaries in this text so Luke 4 tells us why change is so hard. ...because you might be thrown over a cliff!

V. Conclusion

- a. What are we already doing that is living into purpose
- b. What can we do to further stretch us to live into purpose

Quotes and Further Study

"All I want to say to you is you are the Beloved, and all I hope is that you can hear these words as spoken to you with all the tenderness and force that love can hold. I want you to hear that voice. It is not a very loud voice because it is an intimate voice. It comes from a very deep place. It is soft and gentle. I want you to gradually hear that voice. We both have to hear that voice and claim it for ourselves that that voice speaks the truth, our truth. It tells us who we are. That is where the spiritual life starts, by claiming the voice that calls us the beloved."

– HENRI NOUWEN

"Vocation is the place where your deepest gladness and the world's deepest hunger meet."

– FREDERICK BUECHNER

"The heart, in the ancient sacred traditions, has a very specific and perhaps surprising meaning. It is not the seat of our personal affective life—or even, ultimately, of our personal identity—but an organ for the perception of divine purpose and beauty. . . Finding the way to where our true heart lies is the great journey of spiritual life."

– CYNTHIA BOURGEOULT

"Mother Teresa once said, 'I do what I can, where I am, with what I have.' Though we are not Mother Teresa, there's not a person among us who cannot say the same."

– FRED CRADDOCK