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Oak Grove UMC
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The Mission: Love God

Deut. 6: 4-9 & 20- 25

⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

²⁰When your children ask you in time to come, “What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?” ²¹then you shall say to your children, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²²The Lord displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. ²³He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. ²⁴Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. ²⁵If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right.”

(slide 1: The Mission)

What is a church supposed to do?

Businesses exist to produce a product and make a profit.

Nonprofits exist to promote a cause and make a difference.

Schools exist to educate.

Governments exist to promote the common good of the people.

Sports exist for exercise, community and entertainment.

The arts exist to inspire and entertain.

What does the Church exist to do?

This can be a difficult question because Churches do many of the things that other organizations do, we:

- Need to be financially responsible like a business
- Promote good causes and make a difference like a non-profit
- Educate people in the faith, and churches have often provided regular education
- Because we also promote the common good like a government
- And churches have been known to have sports teams and engage in the arts.

There are many good and wonderful things that churches do, but as a small local church we can only do so much, so every so often it's helpful to re-focus on our basic mission.

At the beginning of the summer I called together a small group to take a look at all the things we do as a church and categorize them into Ministry Areas so that we could work together more effectively. And while we were doing this Gwenda reminded us that everything that we do should have a scriptural basis. So we talked about, what are the BIG scriptural mandates that describe the essential work of the church -- that is to say -- what's our Mission?

Here's what we came up with for The Mission of the Church:

(slide 2: house graphic)

Love God. Based on Deuteronomy 6: 5

Love One Another. Based on John 13:34

Meet Together. Based on Hebrews 10:25

Reach Out to care for the least of these. Based on Matthew 25:40

Good Stewards. Based on 1 Peter 4:10

Essentially, the mission of the Church is love.

Loving God,

loving one another,

meeting together to stay focused on love,

Reaching out to love our neighbors through service and

being good stewards of the resources God has provided us so that we can love all the more.

For the next several weeks we'll focus on each of these mission areas, their scriptural basis, and how we are working on living them out here.

(Slide 3: Love God portion of the house)

“love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

(Deut 6:5)

We are called to love God. But Mission is all about what we do, not just what we feel.

So the missional expression of Loving God is how we, as a church, support people in loving God.

One way we support people in loving God is to hold worship services, which includes the ministry of lots of different people: ushers, greeters, leaders, audio/ visual, visual arts, flowers, musicians and seasonal teams to pull it all together.

(slide 4: Love God centered Ven diagram)

But, if you look at Deuteronomy 6, especially if you read beyond the small portion we read today, Loving God isn't just worship, it also overlaps with other areas of our mission.

- Loving God includes teaching our children to love God, so it overlaps with faith formation
- Loving God includes obedience to God's laws, so it overlaps with administration and stewardship
- And loving God includes obedience to God's mandates to love our neighbors, which overlaps with reaching out to care for the least of these and inclusion and hospitality.

And we see the same sense of overlap in our ministry areas

(slide 5: house graphic)

Worship overlaps with hospitality, inclusion, faith formation, reaching out, and stewardship. And they all overlap together.

Which means, when we're doing the work of our specific mission, we need to work together with those whose ministry overlaps with ours..

For example, our wonderful choir director, Sarah, her primary focus is music. But when we work together she can choose music in a powerful way to support faith formation, and she can lead the choir in functioning as an inclusive small group, and by being responsible with the music budget she can participate in good stewardship, and the choir could even do outreach together in a variety of ways yet to be imagined!

But, the choir's primary focus is to help people love God by experiencing God through music.

So while they **could** form a barbershop quartet to sing about the benefits of frequent hand washing during flu season...

unless stopping a flu outbreak was a real need in our particular community, they probably wouldn't.

Because the choir's primary focus is to help people love God through music, and singing about disease control might take time away from preparing for worship.

It's important for us to be focused in our mission because God calls the church to a mission of love and, as Diana Butler Bass pointed out, there's really no organization other than the Church that has love as it's primary mission.

For the next several weeks I'll be talking about our Mission in worship, but it's our mission together, not just my mission, so it's important for you to be a part of the conversation.

So we're going to be having a couple of town hall meetings on September 24 and 25.

Our goal is to sharpen our focus.

To meet together in groups focused on each of these 5 Missional areas.

Talk about what we, together have the calling, energy and resources to do this coming year and then make plans to do it.

We're doing this because your leadership has been listening.

We have heard some of you say that you don't feel like you know who to talk to in order to get things done since we made the switch to Single Board governance 2 years ago. I know how you feel! There are some things that have felt really unclear to me too. I'm hoping that regrouping under these core ministry areas will help us focus and talk to one another about what we want to do together so we can get it done!

We have heard some of you say that you're new and are looking for places to serve, but don't want to end up in charge of something all by yourselves. Having ministry areas gives everyone a group to work with and an opportunity to share new ideas and learn from people who have done things before.

We have heard some of you say that you have been really involved in one thing and maybe would like to try something new. As we reorganize and recruit new leadership this creates opportunities to make a shift. Also, the overlapping nature of the Ministry areas gives you an opportunity to work collaboratively across ministry areas.

We have heard some of you say that you just want to stop talking and get some stuff done!
Me too.

I've been out in the community making all kinds of connections with potential homeless ministries we could participate in and community engagement opportunities for us to participate in. I also have many small group ideas that I think many of you will be interested in. But I can't do any of these things all by myself. And I know we can't do all of them. So we need to decide together which things we want to say yes to and which we need to say no to so that we can get starting doing what God has called us to do here and now.

So I'm asking you to do 3 things:

1. Be a part of the conversation.

Attend a town hall meeting on Sunday, Sept 24 at 4:30pm or Monday, Sept 25 at 1pm.

And if we can't, please, pay a little extra attention to the church announcements this fall and respond to the surveys we send out.

2. Pray for our Church. Pray for discernment and wisdom to know what God wants us to do here and now and that God will grant us the courage to do it.

3. Respond to God's call in your life and serve. And if you're not sure about your calling I'll be leading a Spiritual Gifts class starting October 22 as a part of our faith basics series with our confirmands.

Let's discern together: How is God calling us to live out our Mission of Love here and now?
Then let's do it!

Children's Message: God's Love

Today we're talking about Loving God. But the reason we love God is because God first loved us. No matter what we do God loves us. Even when we aren't sure about God, God is sure that God loves us. No matter what.

So I promised that any of you who filled out 5 of these "In Church Today" sheets would get a little back to school gift. And this wasn't easy! Because many of you were off on vacation, and out and about. Several of you came really close, but nobody turned in 5. But I'm going to give all of you a little gift anyway.

Because God loves us no matter what.
God loves us when we reach the goal and when we fall short.
God loves us when we do great things and when we make poor choices.

So I've got fun erasers to remind us that God forgive our mistakes.
And Pencil sharpeners to remind us that God always invites us to start over.

And God loves us no matter what.

Let's pray:
God. Thank you for loving us. No matter what. Amen.