

## **“VISION SUNDAY: *Whats Our Business?*”**

*Romans 12:4-18 • Acts 2:42-47*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 18, 2015

When I was in high school I participated in a program our church put on to help teens with career planning. As part of that program they gave us a book called, *If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else*. I've always loved that title because it's so true. About six years ago we got our first GPS, or Global Positioning System, for the car. The great thing about a GPS is that you put in where you want to go and it gives you directions on how to get there. At least that's the idea.

We were going on vacation to New England that summer. Normally when we travel I sit down with a map and figure out the best route to take. But we had this wonderful new device that would show us exactly where to go. All I had to do was enter the next destination and the GPS would do the rest. Well, as the old saying goes, experience is the best teacher. By the end of the first day we had learned that the GPS doesn't always choose the same route I would have chosen. We learned that in inner-city Philadelphia, by the way. So that evening after supper we took out the maps and plotted out our route for the rest of the trip. And we learned that the GPS can be a wonderful tool as long as you know where you are trying to go.

Basically, when you are traveling, whether you use a GPS or a map, you need to know three things. First, you need to know where you are. You can have a great map of your destination but if you don't know where you are now, it won't do you much good. Second, you need to know where you want to end up. As the title of the book says, if you don't know where you are going, you'll probably end up somewhere else. Third, once you know where you are now and where you want to end up, you can plan the best way to get there. To do that well you need to have the right tools, including current maps. The GPS has to be updated as roads change.

You know, the same thing applies to the

church. The world around us is changing very rapidly. The way people interact with each other today is very different than it was even ten years ago. I received an email recently with a picture of a Radio Shack advertisement from the mid-nineties. It included computers, cell phones, cameras, televisions, radios, and a number of other electronic devices. The caption below it said, “everything offered for sale in this ad is now contained in your smart phone. People today are more connected than at any time in history. You can easily communicate with people around the world through email, texting, and social networking like Facebook or Instagram or Twitter. But we tend to “do” church the same way we've done it for years. Our destination is still the same but we need to update our maps.

Today is what we're calling “Vision Sunday.” This morning I want us to begin the process of mapping out where God is leading us as a church. We're not ready to work on a detailed map yet, but we want to start talking about a vision of where we are going. Just like planning a trip, we need to know where we are now and where we need to be so we can decide the best route to get there. Let me just say that as we talk about this over the coming weeks and months, we need to remember that the process is just as important as the end result. This will make more sense in a moment.

Our goal through all of this is to become a healthy church. The obvious question, then, is “what is a healthy church?” I'm glad you asked. This is where the process of planning and seeking God's guidance is so important. The church is people, not buildings or programs. The church, as our passage from Romans says, is the body of Christ. “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

So if a church is a group of Christ-followers,

a healthy church is one that is *effective* in its mission. Peter Drucker, the great management expert, said, “efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right thing.” Lots of very efficient businesses have failed. They did everything right but they weren’t doing the right things. The question, then, is “what’s the right thing?” In other words, what is our business? Why does the church, any church, exist?

Before we answer that, let’s be clear on what’s NOT our business. Several years ago there was a survey of several thousand church members across the country. They asked them why the church exists. The number one answer was that the church exists to take care of its members. That couldn’t be farther from the truth. The church is not merely a religious services provider. Our goal is not to provide the best customer service in town. We are not here primarily to entertain or to satisfy your desires and preferences.

Instead, the Bible teaches us that the church exists for one purpose: to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Everything we do as a church should be focused on helping people to meet and love and follow and worship Jesus. To help focus us on that mission, the passage from Acts 2 will serve as a guide for helping us become the church that God wants us to be because it describes the first church and it is all about the mission of the church. Listen to Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers.” I want us to memorize that verse. Repeat it after me: “They devoted themselves / to the apostles teaching / and the fellowship, / the breaking of bread / and the prayers.”

From this passage we see that there are five things that describe fully-devoted disciples. According to the dictionary, to be devoted means, “to give all or a large part of one’s time or resources to a person, activity, or cause.” In other words, when it says they devoted themselves, it means that being disciples was the most important thing in their lives. One of

the characteristics of the early church is that they wanted to be together. Verse 44 says, “all who believed were together and had everything in common.” They had a common mission.

The front of your bulletin has a graphic to help you remember the five points, and over the next five weeks we are going to study each one more closely so this morning I’m going to simply introduce them. Here goes. First of all, disciples of Jesus are devoted to worshiping together. Verse 46 says that day by day they attended the temple together. Worship was a priority in their lives. It should be a priority in your life as well. Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. That love is expressed in worship.

Second, disciples connect with other disciples. The Christian faith is about relationships. It’s about a relationship with Christ which leads us to intentional relationships with others – relationships with other believers and relationships with non-believers. Romans 12:10 basically says, “Love each other like family.” That’s what we are. As we learned last week, baptism is a sign of our adoption into God’s family. The early church devoted themselves to the fellowship. The word “fellowship” doesn’t describe punch and cookies. It describes the church family. It’s the same word used in other places to describe marriage. It’s important to point out that “breaking of bread” is mentioned twice in this passage. Sometimes we joke about churches and food but eating together really is central to developing relationships. Our goal is for First Presbyterian Church to be a place known for deep, loving, caring relationships.

The third thing disciples do is grow in their faith. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. Where do we find the Apostles’ teaching? It’s the Bible. Devoted followers of Jesus have a hunger to read and know and share the Word of God. Prayer is another way we grow in our faith. Studies of churches that have begun to grow indicated that prayer was the most important aspect of that growth. Prayer

changes things. Most of all, prayer changes *us*.

Fourth, disciples serve. They minister to other people. The church is the Body of Christ. We are his hands and feet. Romans 12:11 says, “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.” We serve the Lord by serving in the church, in our community, and around the world. The church is to have an outward focus, not inward. The secret to serving is to love the people you serve. The way you learn to love them is through developing a relationship with them.

Finally, disciples of Jesus invite others to join them in that relationship. Disciples make disciples. They invite people to meet and love and follow and worship Jesus. They are intentional about building relationships with

non-believers, helping them to connect and grow and worship and serve and then go out and invite others.

Let me finish with this. In the book *Alice in Wonderland*, there’s a scene where Alice comes to a fork in the road where she meets the Cheshire Cat. “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat. “I don’t much care where—” said Alice. “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.” My prayer is that we will seriously engage the process of becoming the church God wants us to be and I want to invite you to be a part of that vision.

*Amen*