

“Hope’s Mission...and missionaries!”

Dear Friends in Christ:

When Pastor Puls shared with me a few weeks ago the focus of our three week sermon series on **“Hope’s Mission,”** I couldn’t help but reflect on coming to Wake Forest back in 1996 when there was no Lutheran congregation in this community. I was called at that time to come here and be the **“MISSION Developer!”** I loved that title [*not that I don’t love being called “pastor,” just don’t call me “Reverend” because I’m not very reverent sometimes!*] but **“MISSION Developer** captured the essence of every potential congregation - created not for all the little Lutherans who might be hanging around, but for the sake of Christ’s **MISSION** to the world.

The first newsletter that went out to prospective guests and participants was entitled, and remains today, **“MISSION Moments.”** The vision articulated for this new, emerging body of Christ emphasized *“a church focused on outreach,* because the heartbeat of Hope has been, is now, and always should be **MISSION!**

I love the way Steve Green captures this focus in a praise song entitled: *“The Mission.”* The chorus goes like this:

*To love the Lord our God
is the heartbeat of our mission;
the spring from which our service overflows.*

*Across the street or around the world,
the mission's still the same:
Proclaim and live the truth in Jesus' name.*

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Sounds a lot like Hope's **MISSION** statement doesn't it: *"The people of Hope Lutheran Church proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ."* [Say it with me.] Hope's **mission** is focused on inviting people to experience a deeper, life-changing, more personal, relationship with Christ, saved by grace through faith for service! Hope's **mission** is not primarily to get people to "come" to church, [though we preacher's like that!] but that we would **be** the church, people so transformed by the "word and love of Christ" that our daily lives would mirror His love and reflect the teachings of His Word!

So, what does that look like, in a personal and practical way, and as it relates to the life and work of this congregation we now call Hope? At one level, we could simply tick off the boxes of what you and I should do to support **Hope's mission**. We'll probably do a little of that in this sermon series because we honor God when we respond in love to the church's needs and claim a personal stake in the mission. In fact, when we all joined this congregation we made a pledge to do just that didn't we; promising to be faithful, supportive, present, active, prayerful, responding to Christ's love with sacrificial gifts of time, talent and treasure!

But our response to **Hope's Mission** dare not be about *"making lists and checking them twice; about duty, guilt or obligation."* No, God's work here is about changed lives,

inviting trust and faith in a living, loving, forgiving, dying and victorious Lord! We're all here in the same boat: sinful, struggling and sorrowing people; broken and wounded; searching and seeking for hope in Christ! Indeed, the message we "*proclaim and live*" is about a God who "*loved the world so much that He gave His only Son to die for our sins on Calvary's cross; rising on Easter morn to give everlasting life to all who believe...promising His gracious presence always, even to the close of the age!*" (John 3:16; Matthew 28:20)

That Gospel message, my friends is still "**mission critical!**" It links us with the Great Commission of Jesus: "*Go and make disciples of all people, baptize...and teach!*" [Matthew 28:19] **Hope's mission** reminds us every time we go out the doors of this church that we are being sent out there into the mission field of daily life, called "*to proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ!*" In other words, we are **Hope's missionaries**...Christ making a difference in someone's life through the witness and example of the faith we profess!

Now such a calling can certainly feel a bit little overwhelming at times, unless we come to understand how the **mission** is lived out in personal and real world ways. So what I want you to consider today and reflect upon is the witness of the "*three leading ladies*" in today's Scripture lessons: *The widow at Zarephath, Lydia, a seller of purple goods, and the widow with two copper coins.* These Biblical women have a lot to teach us about God's mission in the world.

First, *the widow at Zarephath*, (1 Kings 17:8-16) struggling to survive and maintain hope during a time of literal and spiritual famine! Her day had come down to "*gathering sticks*" to

make a fire to bake her last meal with her son - certainly not a good time for someone to crash your dinner table! Yet Elijah calls out: *“Bring me a little water...bring me a morsel of bread!”* The widow responds, somewhat sarcastic, I think, *“As the Lord your God lives!”* Or in modern lingo, *“God knows, I don’t have enough flour and oil for myself, much less for you! Get lost buster!”*

She’s afraid. Her focus is on what she lacks, the future looks bleak, until Elijah speaks a promise from the Word of the Lord: *“Do not fear...go and do as you have said. But first, make me a little cake and bring it to me.”* In other words, *“little lady, worrisome Mom, fearful soul, God is still present and He will provide!”* And she ***“went and did as Elijah said,”*** encouraged by the Word to faith and trust!

I’ll just bet you know someone out there *“gathering sticks,”* fearful, given up hope, focusing only on what they lack? Perhaps a friend or family member, someone right here in our church that is just making it; living from bread crumb to paycheck, the trajectory of their kids’ lives a cause for great concern, important relationships crumbling all around them, sin and death doing its thing in someone’ life? Maybe your mission this week is this: speak an encouraging, grace-filled, hopeful word from God to someone *“gathering sticks.”* You know who they are!

The *second leading lady* is Lydia, a business woman from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God, sitting by the river with a group of women who had gathered for prayer. (Acts 16:11-15) Paul and Silas sit down and engage them in conversation about Christ. The result: *“The Lord opened Lydia’s heart”* and *“she and her*

whole household were baptized!” She responded with hospitality and welcome, “*prevailing upon Paul and Silas to come and stay at her house*” because she wanted to share more and learn more, being “*judged as faithful to the Lord.*”

What a wonderful mission response, baptized followers of Christ eager to be known as “*faithful to the Lord!*” Faithful in worship and service; faithful in spiritual growth; faithful in hospitality and prayer and witness! Perhaps there’s someone in a group you hang out with right now that if you simply shared what your faith in Christ means to you, *the Lord would open their hearts*” - maybe even an entire family yet to be baptized? Paul and Silas, you see, are long gone, dead...but Preston and you?

The *third leading lady* is known well, the widow’s two copper coins clanging in that offering box, her **mission** nothing less than being generous and faithful in giving. (Mark 12:41-44) Her offering, worth about a penny, was so stirring a testimony to faith and trust that Jesus lifts her up to his disciples as a great example for others to follow. She trusted God to provide everything she needed, even in tough times! Giving is never about how much a person gives, but why we give. The widow lady gave sacrificially because she loved God and needed to honor Him! So do I, so do you...and by the way, it looks like Jesus is watching how we give!

Our mission is clear: “*The people of Hope Lutheran Church proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ!*” May God bless **Hope’s mission...and the missionaries!**