

Calvary United Methodist Church
October 14, 2018

THE MISSION
Rev. Dr. Robert Cook

Message:

Acts 16:1-10

Back in 2012 a quiet death was observed by only a handful of people. The Eastman Kodak Company—the company that supplied film and cameras to the world--and even developed the digital camera—the company synonymous with photography— went bankrupt. How did this happen? Simply put, it forgot its mission.

Kodak did produce a wide variety of film types; it designed and manufactured an array of cameras from the simple to the complex. It made very expensive cameras for the movie industry and supplied the film media required. A generation ago everyone knew what a “Kodak” moment was all about. Ask a 12 year old where you might buy film for your old 35mm SLR camera. They’ll give you a blank stare.

So what happened to Kodak? *They sabotaged their future by forgetting their mission.* They thought it was about cameras and film; about the method not the mission. They bet their future on the past. They lost the bet.

A distant competitor of Kodak’s in the 1980’s was Fuji. They also made a pretty good film product and good cameras. So did Nikon, Canon and a number of others. Fuji got out of the film and camera business and went into digital media, copiers and office automation. They are still around. Your cell phone camera has replaced even those big expensive digital cameras.

I can make similar analogies with the newspaper business. I was a paper boy as a kid. I’ve loved the smell and feel of newsprint and the quiet leisure of reading a print newspaper. But smart companies know it’s not about newsprint but about communicating the news. So, I read online and listen to podcasts, too.

Then, there’s us—the Church. God’s people.

We have a mission –God’s mission. But we seem to have mixed up the mission with the method. A method is how you express your mission. It is an approach that helps you to accomplish your mission. It’s how you do whatever you do. But the mission is why you exist in the first place. We are very fond of our methods. But is the mission that matters. The mission, not the method is what’s sacred.

So let me ask you, for many of you have been here a long time and seen one method after another come and go. We exist because Jesus rose from the dead. We exist to worship together, to support each other in fellowship and to learn how to follow Jesus and express his love in our world. Our methods are not working to reach people beyond our doors—especially younger people. So, here’s my question:

We have a mission straight from the heart of God; but how are the tired going to reach the wired?

The Book of Acts tells the story of how a handful of men and women went out in faith to share the most important story ever told. Much of the book tells the story of the Apostle Paul’s conver-

sion to become the first great Christian evangelist, pastor and teacher.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were sent out by the leaders of the Jerusalem Church to evangelize the vast gentile populations of what was then called Asia Minor, now Syria, Lebanon and Turkey. They were having amazing success. But then, things stalled. They were hindered in their work and felt they were somehow on the wrong track. In prayer they felt that the Holy Spirit was trying to move them in a new but uncomfortable direction. Things just weren't working and they were not seeing the results they were used to seeing.

Then one night Paul has a vision; maybe a dream. But in the vision, he saw a man from Macedonia calling to him: "Come over here and help us!" Paul knew in the depths of his soul that the vision was of God. They abandoned all their plans and prepared to go to Macedonia.

Where is Macedonia? It is in Greece, across the Dardanelles and for Paul and Silas, it was the gateway to Europe. They had never even given Greece or Europe a thought! But God had. To their credit, they gave up the method to pursue the mission. That small act of faith in crossing from the Middle East to Europe changed the world—literally. Because of Paul and Silas, the message of Jesus Christ spread to an entire continent and even to the seat of world power of the day—Rome.

It's all about the mission, however you might employ a method. The mission is foremost.

Calvary Church exists to bring people together in Christ. We meet to worship, fellowship, grow as disciples and to reach out beyond ourselves to bring Christ to people. Our methods—the way we might enjoy a style of music or liturgy, the way we study together or support of children's ministries, youth ministries, choirs, and support groups and how we serve—these are all designed to support our mission. THE MISSION is Primary. How we do it changes according to the need.

Because we confuse the methods we love with the mission we get Ouchy or uncomfortable or even angry when they must change. And sometimes a very successful method runs through its cycle and we are unwilling to evaluate it or to see ourselves changing it. But when you refuse to change the method you risk killing the mission.

Just ask Kodak or the Bon Ton or Sears or K-Mart or a hundred others who are gone or about to go.

What is the Mission of the Calvary United Methodist Church?

Our core mission is not holding services. It's not having choirs. It's not having groups for a social get-together as much fun as that is. It's not having a website, a Facebook page or even a Sunday sermon. These all help us to express our mission and are simply methods.

Calvary United Methodist Church exists to lead people to know Jesus as Lord and to lead them into a growing relationship with Jesus. Or, as our UM mission statement says, we are here to make disciples for Jesus for the transformation of the world. That is our mission.

This means that we can work and pray to find new methods to express our mission. This means that by clarifying and focusing on the mission change is not difficult. It means that God's Spirit can infuse the tired with new life so that we actually can reach the wired.

Right now we don't understand the youth culture. But kids don't have our biases or isms either. They don't think like a 40, 50, 60 or 70 year old. We will never speak to their needs if we only speak to our own likes. We don't know what to make of all the changes in traditional neighborhoods around us or understand how to meet our new neighbors in these neighborhoods. If all we

do is focus on us right here, we will never get a handle on this. **So here is where we can begin.**

We begin first in prayer. Paul had a vision because he prayed for God's direction. Then, don't be afraid to take the next faithful step into a new area—our Macedonia. Trust God to lead us. And then, be compassionate. Those in Macedonia were hurting; they needed Paul's help. Love for Jesus leads to acts of compassion in the name of Jesus. And finally, abandon any method no matter how much you like it, so that you can do God's mission.

Or, you can ignore everything these Scriptures have to say to you today and hope this new reality goes away. Well, that is actually what Kodak did. And as Dr. Phil would say: ***“How's that working for you?”*** Amen.