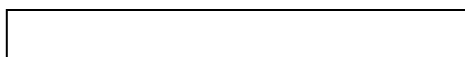


Date: November 1, 2009

Title: How Is YOUR Ministry Going?

Scripture: John 21:3-17 (The Message)

John 21:3-17 (MSG) ³ Simon Peter announced, "I'm going fishing." The rest of them replied, "We're going with you." They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. ⁴ When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn't recognize him. ⁵ Jesus spoke to them: "Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?" They answered, "No." ⁶ He said, "Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens." They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren't strong enough to pull it in. ⁷ Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Master!" When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dove into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in by boat for they weren't far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. ⁹ When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it. ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you've just caught." ¹¹ Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore—153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn't rip. ¹² Jesus said, "Breakfast is ready." Not one of the disciples dared ask, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Master. ¹³ Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead. ¹⁵ After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep." ¹⁷ Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

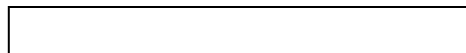


A couple of weeks ago, I went to a pastor's retreat. I wasn't exactly planning to go until I heard that the Bishop said the retreat was not required, but it wasn't optional either. So I went on the retreat. It was a great retreat because of the content and the spirit, but one of the best parts is to see some of the folks with whom I have history; old friends that I haven't seen for some time. And one question that all of us pastors seem to ask each other is asked at these events is, "How is your ministry doing?" For the most part the answer is usually, "Good, good, how about you?" It makes sense that you would ask that question of a bunch of pastors. I mean it is pretty well expected that if you are a pastor, you are going to have a ministry. I mean, ministry is what we *ministers do*, right? We get paid to *do* ministry.

So, if you were to ask me or any other pastor, "How is your ministry going?" and I or any other pastor was to look at you with a quizzical look, and answer, "What do you mean, my ministry?" you would be surprised, wouldn't you? You might think that this pastor must be pretty confused about his profession and about his calling from God.

But if I turn this around a little bit and ask **you** how **your** ministry is going, what will you say? How many of you will be able to answer clearly? Will you answer, "What made you think I was a pastor?" or "I'm not in the ministry." Or, do you have a clear picture in your mind of what your ministry is?

Now, I'm guessing that you may not have thought about it much and if this is the case, I want to apologize to you for not doing a very good job as your pastor. I apologize because this is such a fundamental question for every Christian to consider. It may seem like an unusual question for clergy to ask a layperson, but the truth is, when we are called to follow Jesus, we are called into the ministry. You may not be called into fulltime Christian service, but you are called into the ministry.



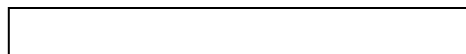
This is not a new thing either. This is something that goes all the way back to one of the first times God got in direct touch with our species. Do you remember when God called Abraham to leave the land of Ur and go to the Promised Land? God said, *I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous...*(this is the first part of God's promise, but it is not the end of it.) The sentence continues... *and you will be a blessing to others. Gen 12:2 (NLT)*

Now, I admit that this is a little simplified, but what I read from this is that God is inviting each of us into relationship. So when we begin to follow God and do what God wants us to do God blesses us. Our lives take on purpose and meaning. And for many people this is where their walk with Christ seems to begin and end.

- Jesus has blessed me so much!!
- I can do anything with Jesus Christ in my heart!
- I'm not worried about where I'm going when I die, because I know Jesus.
- I have been blessed beyond belief.
- Isn't being a Christian wonderful!!

Well, yes, I think it is wonderful in more ways than I can count, and my life has been blessed beyond belief since I have given it to Christ, but if all we do is collect the blessings, I'm afraid that our lives will end up shallow and we will miss the most of what God has planned for us.

This is why I believe that it is so important to understand that when we give our lives to Christ, we are called into ministry. This doesn't mean that every person's ministry is in a church, and not every person is to preach or be an evangelist, but people who follow Jesus and who are committed to His purpose on this earth are motivated not just by how good life can be, but by

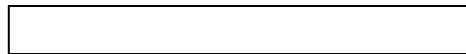


the love that has invaded their lives. It is a love that is far too good to keep to oneself.

Let's consider the passage from John that I read this morning. What we are seeing in this passage is a very large shift in Peter from fisherman to Apostle. Peter is disappointed that his Messiah has been crucified and we get the impression that Peter and a few of the other disciples have about come to the conclusion that following Jesus has turned out to be a waste of time. So in confusion and disappointment, Peter decides to give up on ministry and go back to fishing. He doesn't do too well the first night until he follows Jesus' instructions. When he throws the net over to the other side of the boat they bring in so many fish they can't get them all into the boat. This is like dejavu all over again because this is how Peter met Jesus in the first place. As soon as Peter realizes that Jesus has not left him after all, he jumps over the side of the boat and swims to Jesus' side as fast as he can. They have breakfast and then Jesus gives Peter some very serious instructions. Three times Jesus asks Peter "Do you love me?" and three times Peter answers, "Of course I do, Jesus!" And after each of Peter's answers Jesus says, "Peter if you love me, feed my sheep."

When I read this passage it's pretty easy for me to change it up and make it personal like this"

After breakfast one day, Jesus said to me , "Steve, you who have been called to pastor the First United Methodist Church of Fountain, do you love me more than these?" (I interpret these to mean all of the distractions that fill my day) I answer, "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Then Jesus says to me, "Feed my lambs." He then asks a second time, "Steve, pastor of FUMC Fountain, do you love me?" "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus' reply is almost the same, "Shepherd my sheep." Then



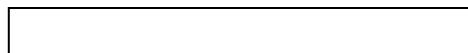
Jesus asks me a third time: "*Steve, pastor of FUMC Fountain, do you love me?*" At this point my reaction is very much like Peter's, I get a little annoyed that Jesus has to ask me three times so I say, "*Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you.*" And one more time, Jesus drives home the point, "*Feed my sheep.*"

How about you? Can you see yourself in this story? I'm pretty sure that Jesus' words were for all of us, not just to apostles and pastors.

The thing is, we are all part of one grand mission that was begun for us 2000 years ago. Jesus said to his disciples, "But He said to him, "but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." Luke 9:60 (NASB)

To proclaim the Kingdom of God is to make others aware of what God is doing in the world and in your life. Have you been touched by the hand of God? If so, then let the world know about it. You don't have to stand on the street corner with a bullhorn and a sign. That might be how you choose to *proclaim* the Kingdom of God coming into your life, but I can think of a lot of other ways too.

I remember a conversation I had with a man about a year and a half ago. I was just a little concerned about him because though he was coming to church pretty regularly, he wasn't getting involved with the various activities of the church. So, I just asked him how things were going and he excitedly told me of his ministry with the families and their children to whom he taught English as a second language. He had just received a contract for the next school year and he told me about how he wasn't concerned at all about how much his salary would be next year because he knew that he was doing what God wanted him to be doing. Every time one of his students comes into the building and runs up to give him a hug, or every



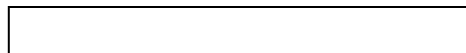
time he is able to help an immigrant family understand better how to function in this foreign culture, he knows that he is doing what God has called him to do.

This man is in ministry. Jesus has touched his life and turned by his own admission a very self-centered and frustrated business man into a Christ following minister of Jesus Christ proclaiming to those he meets that the Kingdom of God is near and available. He doesn't have to use a bullhorn or a lot of words about Jesus saving his life, because his life is the message.

Now, I know that for some of you this sound very strange. You might be wondering, "What could my ministry possibly be?" or "How do I go about finding what my ministry might be?" or, "I'm already doing a lot. Isn't that my ministry?"

The short and simple answer to this question is one word: **Listen**. The more complicated answer to this question is **listen, listen, and listen**.

1. First, we must listen to the Holy Spirit as we ask God to speak to us in prayer. In our prayers we ask God to expand our vision to where God is at work and where there are things to correct.
2. Second, we must listen to the scriptures as they give us instruction. The Biblical story is not merely the story of an ancient nation of people; it is also the story of God's interaction with those people. We need to read the scriptures looking for places where their story intersects with our story. We have to look deeper into the stories to find the underlying messages that are there for each one of us at any given time in our lives.
3. And third, we must listen to our hearts as they draw our attention to events and circumstances that are occurring in the world. The world, in this case includes our families, our places of employment, our local



community as well as national and international concerns. Where do we see social issues that need to be addressed? How do we show the love that Christ has placed in our hearts to a hurting world?

Of course, I could go on and perhaps someday, I will do a series on the three ways we listen to find and fine-tune our ministry. But for now we'll have to leave it at that.

Let me wrap it up this way:

I know that many of you are doing so much for the church and for the community. If you are listening to God, Scripture and your heart and hearing that this is what God wants you to be doing, that is likely your ministry. But if you are just "busy" because that's how Americans are, I urge you to take some time to listen. And if you hear Jesus asking you the question, "Do you love me?" and "Do you love me more than the activities that pull at you and distract you from living out the purpose for which you were created?" Think honestly about the answer. It really is appropriate to wrestle with that question.

But if and when you answer Jesus with a hardy "YES" remember that his response is... "Then feed my sheep." Amen.