

Sunday January 25, 2025

First Lesson: Mark 8:22-26

GOSPEL READING: Luke 4:14–21

Sermon Series: Revitalize: Purpose

Preacher: Kirstie Jeanette Engel

- We are continuing with our sermon series "Revitalize," this week, where this week **we are focusing on revitalizing our purpose.**
- **The first question I would invite us to consider is why is understanding our purpose important?**
- Purpose for me, is the anchor that grounds us in our faith journey, both as individuals and as a collective body of Christ.
- Without purpose, we risk wandering aimlessly, reacting to the demands of the moment without the clarity or conviction that comes **from knowing why we exist and what we are called to do.**
- This is true for individuals, **but it is especially critical for the Church, where the stakes are not just personal but communal and eternal.**

- Individually, understanding our purpose allows us to live authentically and meaningfully.
- When we embrace the gifts God has uniquely placed within us, we find not only fulfillment but also alignment with God's greater plan.
- Our lives take on a sense of direction, and our actions become an intentional reflection of God's love and grace. We become stewards of our talents, time, and energy, living into the abundant life Christ calls us to experience.
- Collectively, as a Church, **understanding our shared purpose enables us to embody the mission of God in the world.**
- The Church is not just a gathering of individuals but a living, breathing representation of the Body of Christ.
- **When we are unified in purpose, our ministries flourish, our outreach expands, and our witness to the world becomes compelling.**

- Exploring what our scriptures teach us about purpose invites us to reflect deeply on the themes revealed in our first lesson, Mark 8:22-26.
- In Mark, the two-stage healing serves as more than a miraculous event; it symbolizes the process by which understanding and purpose unfold in our lives.
- At first, the man sees people but perceives them as "trees walking." His vision is blurry, incomplete.
- It's only through the persistent and intimate touch of Jesus that his sight is fully restored.
- Some questions we might want to consider from these passages are; How often does this mirror our journey of purpose? Are there moments when we see, but only partially—when we sense God's calling but remain unsure of the next steps?
- From there, we turn to Luke 4:14-21, where Jesus proclaims His mission in the synagogue, grounding His ministry in the prophetic words of Isaiah.

- Jesus boldly announces His purpose: **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”**
- In this moment, Jesus not only identifies His mission but places Himself squarely within the story of God’s unfolding plan for justice, liberation, and restoration.
- By referencing Isaiah, Jesus ties His purpose to the broader narrative of God’s covenant with Israel, reminding us that our purpose is never isolated but always part of something greater.
- Some questions from this story for us to consider are; What would it mean for us to claim and live out such a bold sense of purpose? How might it transform the way we see ourselves and our role in the world?
- When we look at Mark 8:22-26 and Luke 4:14-21 side by side, a powerful thread emerges: **discovering purpose requires a step of faith.**

- In both stories, the invitation to clarity and understanding unfolds not in certainty or ease but in trust and action.
- Faith becomes the pathway by which God's purpose is revealed and embraced, both for the individuals in the text and for us today.
- In Mark's account of the blind man in Bethsaida, we see Jesus leading the man out of the village—a village rebuked by Jesus in Matthew 11:21 for its lack of faith.
- This setting reminds us that clarity of purpose often begins in places resistant to change or belief.
- The man does not heal himself; he must trust Jesus to lead him away from the familiar, to a space where his vision—both physical and spiritual—can be restored.
- Even then, the healing comes in stages.
- The man's initial vision is blurry, requiring a second touch from Jesus to see clearly.

- This layered process reflects our own journeys: sometimes, we need to take multiple steps of faith before God's purpose becomes fully clear.
- Are we willing to trust God in moments of partial clarity, believing that more will be revealed in time?
- **This was a radical and disruptive message in His time—and it still is today leaving us to consider are we ready to step out in faith and claim our role in this ongoing work?**
- These questions and more invites us to reflect not only on the stories of scripture but on the conversations we've been having within our own Church community.
- In our business meetings, Staff Parish Relations Committee, Board of Trustees discussions, and a recent Church Council discussion, we've been witnessing what it means to be faith-filled leaders grappling with exciting yet challenging opportunities.

- One such opportunity is the partnership with the Northeast Family Center—a collaboration that I firmly believe has been placed into our hands by God.
- This partnership represents not only a chance to enhance and repair our facilities, including the long-awaited addition of a playground and building improvements, but also a chance to breathe new life into our space.
- Imagine a daycare filled with children during the week, the sounds of laughter and learning ringing through our halls.
- Envision opportunities for our members to volunteer and deepen relationships with partners like Nebraska Wesleyan University and the University Place neighborhood.
- **This is a vision of purpose**, one that embodies what it means to serve and invest in the beloved community.
- However, this vision will require faith.

- Entering into a 15-year lease and the commitment it entails is no small step.
- It is, for some, a bold and even daunting leap of faith—especially when so many churches today are wrestling with questions about viability amidst aging memberships and broader church decline.
- Yet, here we are, being invited to cast our nets to the other side as Jesus has instructed his disciples in scripture, trusting that God’s abundance will meet us where faith takes us.
- The story of casting the net to the other side found in 1 Peter 5 resonates deeply here for me.
- When the disciples had fished all night without success, Jesus called them to try again, to trust Him, to shift their approach and believe in what seemed impossible.
- And the result was not just a catch but an overwhelming abundance.

- This story isn't just about fish—it's about faith, obedience, and trusting that God is not done working in us or through us.
- As a Church, we are fighters.
- This is why I love being your Spiritual Leader—it is truly an honor and a privilege for me to be able to serve here.
- Why I am particularly in love with this ministerial context of Lincoln First is because you all don't shy away from the hard conversations or the challenging moments.
- At Lincoln First, we embrace the truth of Jesus' declaration: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed."
- This declaration has always been the calling of Lincoln First United Methodist Church, and it will continue to be so.

- With this understanding of who you are as a Church community, this is why I can testify that our Church doors will not close.
- Many of us have come too far for God to discard our efforts and faithfulness now.
- **Lincoln First has always been favored**, not because of our own strength, but because we are people of faith—faith that walks by trust and not by sight.
- We are not a Church that has large endowments supporting us; we pay our bills and we stay united and trust that somehow, somewhere, the metaphorical manna from heaven will reign down; just as it did 20 years ago, **just as it will continue to do for us today and going forward.**
- For this is God's Church, and God is faithful!
- All things **work together for good** to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose;

- This means that although we wrestle with challenges, we also see the blessings.
- We recognize God's hand in the opportunities before us, and we are willing to step out into the unknown, **trusting that God will provide what we need to fulfill our purpose.**
- Now is our moment to embody that faith even more.
- To commit to what God is doing in our midst.
- To believe in the future God is preparing for us and for those we are called to serve.
- Are we ready to cast our nets to the other side and experience the abundance of what God has in store?
- My prayer is that as we continue to come together—and the keyword is Together, as people of faith, **we will say, "Yes."**
- For I will echo a variation of the words from my recent speech at the MLK vigil I gave at the County Jail last week on one of the coldest days of Nebraska this year;

We are the ones we've been waiting for.....so now its
time for us to get to work!