

Jesus was a man on a mission. He healed the sick, turned water into wine, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, washed the feet of his disciples, commanded them to love one another, and showed them the way to God. His mission was clear. But did he have a "mission statement"? A concise expression of purpose? Something such as: "To inspire and nurture the human spirit"? No, wait - that's the mission statement for a very well known Coffee company that many of us may be familiar with, especially here in the Northwest. Can you guess which one? You may not recognize their mission statement but I bet you are familiar with their logo, which contains a mermaid. Yep, I'm talking about Starbucks and as an international coffee company they are on a mission "to inspire and nurture the human spirit - one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time." Sounds awfully spiritual, doesn't it?

Let me share just a few others with you. A film company well known for their children's movies and theme parks has a mission "to entertain, inform and inspire people around the globe through the power of unparalleled storytelling, reflecting the iconic brands, creative minds and innovative technologies that make ours the world's premier entertainment company. –Disney. A famous beverage maker claims, "Everything we do is inspired by our enduring mission: To Refresh the World... in body, mind, and spirit, to Inspire Moments of Optimism and happiness. To create value and make a difference. –Coca Cola.

Nowadays it would seem that coming up with a mission statement has become an essential tool for big and small businesses alike; with a wide range of organizations crafting them in an attempt to capture their core values, purposes, and goals. The problem with most of them is they wind up sounding complex and boring, such as the one that reads: "Our challenge is to assertively network economically sound methods of empowerment so that we may continually negotiate performance-based infrastructures." Blah, blah, blah

As followers of Christ I'm certain we would agree that Jesus would never have wanted his mission to be so complex and boring. We most certainly can do better! Kevin Starr an executive director of a private foundation focused on philanthropy has seen a ton of mission statements in his work, which matches investment dollars with socially minded businesses. "Most companies, regardless of their sectors, have a mission statement," he tells the Harvard Business Review. "And most are awash in jargon and marble-mouthed pronouncements. Worse still, these gobbledygook statements are misremembered or flatly ignored by frontline employees."

If a business wants to receive some investment dollars from Starr and his Foundation, they need to have a clear and compelling mission statement. Fortunately, Starr gives some excellent advice to companies that seek his funding: They must express their mission in no more than eight words. That's the max: an eight-word mission statement. Starr also requires that companies follow a certain format: "verb, target, outcome." Start with a strong action word, name the target of the work and describe the outcome. Some good examples: "Save endangered species from extinction." "Improve African children's health." "Clear and compelling mission statements, using eight words or fewer, aren't likely to be forgotten, misremembered or ignored.

So what should be included in a mission statement for the followers of Jesus, based on the words he spoke the night before his death? "If you love me," he says to his disciples, "you will keep my commandments." That's a punchy start, but this first verse alone exceeds the eight-word limit. Let's continue to explore our Gospel story for today and see if we can come up with something a little better.

As Jesus is sharing the last supper with his disciples, he offers them words of assurance that God will provide a way for him to be with them ever after he is no longer physically present among them. "I will ask the Father," promises Jesus, "and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." The word Advocate comes from the Greek word *parakletos* - one who exhorts, comforts, helps and makes an appeal on another person's behalf. More than one acceptable English translation exists for *parakletos*, which is why one Bible will render the word "Advocate," another will say "Comforter" and, still another, "Counselor." All these English words describe the "Spirit of truth" that God will send to the disciples, and Jesus predicts that "you know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

This is a good start to an authentic Christian mission statement: Love Christ, do the right thing, receive the Advocate, Comforter, Counselor, Spirit of truth. But wait, there's more - "I will not leave you orphaned," promises Jesus; "I am coming to you." Jesus assures his disciples they will see him after his death and resurrection, and he predicts that their future, our future, will be marked by an amazing intimacy between God,

Jesus and all his followers. "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you," he says, describing in this tumbling jumble of pronouns a beautiful blend of divine and human elements.

Then Jesus circles back to where he began, making another link between loving him and keeping his commandments. Instead of commandments, we might say, "Do the right thing," or "Do the God-thing" or "WWJD". Just imagine Jesus sitting with his disciples, sharing some last minute words of wisdom with them as they pass bread and wine around the table. He is preparing them for continuing on with the mission he started, a mission that would proclaim God's love through Christ's crucifixion. "Those who observe my commandments, declares Jesus, are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Although we might have differing opinions over what it means to follow his commandments, the point is that Jesus connects living right with loving right. For many people, loving and commandment-keeping are very different approaches to the Christian faith. For Jesus, they're one and the same! After hearing John's Gospel proclaimed today, one can easily see how mission statements can become awash in jargon and marble-mouthed pronouncements. There's so much to say, and the temptation is to try to say it all. But remember the marks of an effective statement: verb, target, outcome. Eight words, no more.

Fortunately, Jesus includes several strong action words in our passage from John: love, keep, know, abide, see, live. And he offers a clear target as well: the creation of a community of people who love Christ, keep his Commandments and experience a truly amazing intimacy with Jesus, God, and one another. (Don't forget this is both a vertical and horizontal commandment!) And what will be the outcome of this effort? To receive the Holy Spirit - receive the one who is an Advocate, Comforter and Counselor, as well as the continuing presence and power of Jesus Christ himself.

Verbs, target, outcome...A mission statement is slowly emerging, and it seems to be boiling down to eight essential words: Love Christ, keep his commandments, receive the Spirit. This is our mission: to be a community of people who love Christ and keep his commandments - seeing these actions as complementary, not contradictory. Loving and commandment-keeping are two sides of the same spiritual coin, revealing both energy and order, affection and obedience. If we can hold them together, then we'll be in a position to receive the Holy Spirit.

So how do we do it? First, we love Christ. An American Novelist and non-fiction writer named Anne Lamott was a 30-year-old single, hip, intellectual agnostic who didn't think she wanted to have anything to do with Jesus. In her book *Traveling Mercies*, she tells of how she became pregnant by a married man. She had an abortion and was sadder than she'd been since her father died. She drank and took pills to dull the pain. Then, one night, lying in the darkness, she became aware of someone with her, hunkered down in the corner. She knew it was Jesus. "I felt him just sitting there in the corner of my sleeping loft," she writes, "watching me with patience and love."

For the next few days, Lamott sensed Jesus following her everywhere, like "a little cat or dog that never leaves your side" Finally, she took a long, deep breath and said out loud, "All right. You can come in." Looking back on the experience, Lamott says, "I was dying, and I got a second chance. I do believe I was saved."

We love Jesus because he first loved us. He comes to us with patience and love, and he saves us. Then we do the right thing: We keep his commandments. Now that doesn't mean we suddenly achieve a state of moral perfection, with an ability to check off the list of spiritual qualities and attitudes mentioned by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. But it does mean we respond to Christ's love with a desire to live an orderly and obedient life - one that's organized around the new commandment of Jesus to "love one another." Loving and commandment-keeping come together when Jesus says to his disciples, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Such love isn't so much an emotion, as it is a deep desire to order our lives around the example Jesus set. It means championing the cause of the underdog, reaching out to the downtrodden, working to build up God's kingdom on earth and being willing to sacrifice for others. "No one has greater love than this," says Jesus, "to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." Only by surrendering

ourselves to God, by putting His will above our own wishes and desires, can we fully show the people around us that we are friends of Jesus Christ.

Finally, our mission comes to its conclusion when we receive the Spirit. This is the final phrase in our mission statement, the outcome of our loving Christ and our commandment-keeping. It's usually experienced in a community of faith, such as the Presbyterian congregation where Anne Lamott is a member. She writes, "One of our members, a man named Ken Nelson, is dying of degenerative disease, disintegrating before our very eyes." He has a totally lopsided face, ravaged and withered, but "when he smiles, he is radiant. He looks like God's crazy nephew."

Ken says he would gladly pay any price for what he has now, which is Jesus - and his congregation. During the prayers of the people, Ken talks "joyously of his life and his decline, of grace and redemption, of how safe and happy he feels!" He is dying but is full of the Holy Spirit - full of God's Advocate, God's Comforter, God's Counselor. He is blessed, filled with the love of Jesus, and at peace.

Perhaps alongside our own congregation's mission statement, which I mentioned a few weeks ago, and remember it can be found on our website, and has been printed on our bulletins, we can embrace another purpose for our lives. That is: "Love Christ, keep his commandments, receive the Spirit." No jargon. No gobbledygook. Just eight words of authentic Christian mission. Thanks be to God. AMEN