

Introductions

Check-in & Introductions

A Vision of Tradition and Transformation

Sermon Reflection Notes

Jesus' final words to his disciples in Matthew's Gospel are known as the Great Commission and are the paragon of his teaching: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." These words are why the Church began 2,000 years ago; they are why the Methodist movement took off 300 years ago, and they are why Methodists in this area began meeting secretly and illegally over 225 years ago, laying the foundation for what has become Manchester United Methodist Church. The Great Commission is the command to be "all in."

In 1996, the United Methodist Church adapted the Great Commission into our mission statement:

"To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." (Mission Statement)

It helps to understand what a disciple is if we intend to fulfill our mission. As United Methodists, we've known the general rules for being a disciple to be: Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.

The General Rule of Discipleship is a contemporary statement of the general rules. It distills the general rules down to a single, straightforward statement that can be easily memorized. Pastor Ron has been encouraging us for a little over a year now to reflect on how we live as disciples by talking about the General Rule of Discipleship (from the *Book of Discipline*):

"To witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teachings through acts of worship, devotion, justice, and compassion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." (Rule of Discipleship)

We've heard about the public and private ways to love God and neighbor through acts of worship, devotion, justice, and compassion. We can see examples on our lobby walls, in the way the staff is organized, and how ministries are structured.

As we look toward celebrating the 200th anniversary of Manchester United Methodist Church, creating a new vision statement helps us remember who we are and dream about who we want to be. As we honor the past, it is also vital to know where we are going. So, over the course of the past year, the visioning process unfolded, leading us to craft our new vision statement:

"An ever-growing community of Christ followers, gathering around a table open to all, being transformed by God's grace to actively and fully love God and neighbor." (Vision Statement)

The first clause, "an ever-growing community of Christ followers," roots us in who we are. It speaks of a people always growing in faith, in love, in scope, in reach, in relationships.

The second clause, "gathering around a table open to all," reminds us that Jesus' teachings often took place around tables...tables where he ate and healed and held conversations with friends and enemies, the powerful and the poor, the multitude and the individual. Jesus instituted a sacred meal which is why we gather around the communion table. Perhaps the strongest desire heard in the visioning process was one to make sure the world knows that Manchester UMC welcomes and celebrates all people. All.

The third clause, "being transformed by God's grace to actively and fully love God and neighbor," reminds us that our vision depends wholly on God's grace. The heart of following Jesus is actively and fully loving God and neighbor. Love is not passive, and it is never finished. We seek, as Wesley said, a holiness of heart and life by God's sanctifying grace.

As we begin to put the vision into action, it is clear that Manchester UMC intends to be a church for all generations, embracing our traditions while being transformed for the future. It will take all of us—loving God and neighbor through acts of worship, devotion, justice, and compassion. As God calls us forward into this new vision, we will, as we've always been, indeed be "All In."

Scripture

Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSVUE)

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Discussion Questions

1. The sermon title this week is: A Vision of Tradition and Transformation. Why is 'tradition' part of the vision and visioning process?
2. What does it mean to be transformed? What does it look and feel like when we undergo a transformation?
3. When we imagine and dream about a vibrant, creative, active future of the church, what is one of the first critical steps that will help us live into that future? How do we maintain and build on the contagious sense of delight that is moving through the congregation?
4. How did this new vision statement for the church come to be?
5. As active participants in the congregation, what is our responsibility with the vision? How can we be "All In" in the future of the church?

Closing Prayer

Holy and grace filled God, you continue to always be on the move in the world, in the life of the church and in our own living. Your central vision, (in Scripture, in the tradition of the church, in our own experience and reason,) is that all of creation is one, and every creature is to live in community with every other creature. You call us to live toward the joy and well-being of all creation. Today, we give thanks for our pastors, our leaders, and our congregation who are leading us into the future, so that we may live into your vision, so that we may be faithful disciples, so that we may be transformed by your grace into a people who love God and love our neighbor. Finish then, thy new creation, perfectly restored in Thee. May it be so. We pray all of this through Jesus the Christ. Amen.

"Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be. Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in Thee."