

“Unity in Purpose”

June 5, 2016

Who Cares about Unity? Series – Graduation Sunday & Holy Communion

Today you received a picture of a Venn diagram that has made its way around social media. It seemed fitting to share it as we continue to talk about unity in the church and in our community, but even more as we lift up graduates and pray for them. I hope this can be a tool for all of us - or at least something to take with us and remind us that we do have a purpose. God is going to be with us as you work it out.

I like being able to see this intersection of everything, but it's also challenging. Graduates, you're not the only ones who may struggle with this whole idea of purpose. Pastor Rick Warren wrote *The Purpose-Driven Life* in 2002 asking that age-old question, “What on earth am I here for?”

Warren challenged the world that instead of looking for a purpose on our own, we could and should seek God's purpose for us first. Warren lifted up worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism as God's purposes for us and changed how many in the church viewed themselves.

Take a look at this intersection: **Passion** is what you love. What really is exciting for you? What do you want to do all the time? What do you want to learn more about? **Mission** is what the world needs and what you'll provide for the world. Mission is a driver for many of us and usually something we do for others. **Vocation** comes from the Latin for “calling” and is usually something that you can be paid for and what may support you financially. **Profession** is what you're good at and usually closely connected to your vocation. You can see on the diagram how each is connected.

The intersection of what you love and what you're good at identifies your **passion**. What you're good at and what you can be paid for determine your **profession**. What you can be paid for coming together with what the world needs is your **vocation**. And when what the world needs meets what you love, you've discovered your **mission**. When they all come together, you have your **purpose**.

Now it's easier said than done, and a diagram isn't the answer to everything, but I think it helps all of us to consider how God has given us gifts to use for greater good. Even though my purpose is different from yours, we celebrate unity in our diversity. It's amazing to think about the different passions that our graduates have – wildlife management, medicine, dance, game design, engineering, and other areas - and how they'll continue to live out their calling, grow in their professional lives, and serve the world.

I'm not sure what the apostle Paul would say about this diagram, but I have a feeling he'd relate the fruit of the Spirit to this somehow. Ultimately, our purpose is to honor God who created us, Christ who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who guides us.

Paul's whole message to the Galatians centers around Christian character. Remember what was happening in some of these new churches that Paul had started in Galatia? Paul had shared the Good News of Jesus Christ: everyone could have a direct relationship with God through Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus to set us free and gave us the Holy Spirit as a sign that we are children of God.

But there were issues around what would happen to Jewish Law. Some Jewish Christians thought that Gentiles Christians had to first follow the Law before they could have a complete relationship with Jesus. All this talk was creating division in the Galatian church – not unity.

Paul heard about the struggles, so he wrote to them. He tells them not to reject God by trying to earn their salvation through keeping the Law. Jesus died for them, and there was nothing else to do but believe in Jesus and accept the gift of salvation. There were no conditions on God's grace.

Paul lifts up the idea of "freedom in Christ." He didn't want the people to go back to their old ways of trying to follow the Law as a way to earn God's favor. He had been a devout Jew his entire life, but the experience of meeting Jesus had changed how he thought and how he lived. There is freedom in Christ – not freedom to do whatever we want, but freedom to love and serve God...freedom to love and serve others...freedom to live together in community. That's where this connection to purpose comes in. It's about using God's gifts to us and serving God and others.

We can imagine what happened when Paul told the people to rely on God's grace and the Holy Spirit rather than the Law. We human beings need rules and order, don't we? We need structure. Those who were struggling with how to follow God probably thought that abandoning the Law would leave them without moral guidance.

Jesus had won freedom for those who believed in him, so Paul tells them to act like free people – not being slaves to the law. Then he says that we are free to love. Beyond the intersection of passion, mission, vocation, and profession, that's our ultimate purpose. We should serve one another to follow the call of Jesus – to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

If we don't love as Jesus calls us to do, then the consequences are dire. Paul gives a list of sins of the flesh. These aren't simply sexual sins, though sometimes that's where we focus. Paul cites anything that seeks human desire over God's will, anything that causes us to live at odds with God: when we treat our wants as top priority, keeping enemies, living with jealousy and anger, holding up our own ambitions without asking

God to guide us, shutting others out of the community. This stuff fractures Christian community and breaks it down. That's what was happening in Galatia – the emphasis on human law over God's grace was disrupting community.

But Paul offers some hope for the people. If we live by the Spirit and love as Jesus taught us to do, then we bear the fruit of the Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. Someone explained it this way: "Christians are those in whom the Spirit is free to bear fruit." God's power in the Holy Spirit is sufficient to help us overcome what separates us from God.

Each one of the fruit has many dimensions. These traits aren't just a given for anyone who claims to be a Christian. We don't automatically have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control when we enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ. These traits are cultivated in us. These traits are the harvest that the Holy Spirit produces in us, which is why Paul says that we have to live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit. They grow in us just like fruit grows when we live in the power of the Spirit rather than the flesh.

When we let the Spirit lead us, we take on a specific character. And notice something else – these traits enhance relationships and community. We come back to the truth about Christian character: we live our faith out in community. Graduates, for you and for all of us it's a reminder to surround ourselves with people who help us to stay connected to God and live our faith. They don't all have to believe the same way we do about everything, enjoy the same activities, or come from the same place. But my prayer for you and for all of us is that we focus on our relationship with God so that the fruit of the Spirit is something that others see in us - not as a credit to us, but as a way that we point to God's grace in our lives.

You've been loved and supported by family, friends, teachers, coaches, counselors, and so many others along the way. I'm convinced that we better understand the fruit of the Spirit by seeing it in one another. Where have you seen *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* lately? How will you be the one to show it to someone else?

It seems fitting to come to the table of the Lord - the meal where Jesus is host - as we lift up unity that we find in seeking God's purpose for us. We've focused on unity in agape love that sacrifices for others, unity in the Holy Spirit that brings us together, unity in faith that pushes us to keep on believing in joys and sorrows, and unity in Christ who helps us to see past our human labels and boundaries.

Today we come to the table as those who stand in need of God's help and those who celebrate God's goodness in our lives. I'd invite you to join your heart with mine in prayer as we come to God just as we are.