

WHAT'S YOUR STATEMENT?

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SERVICE THIS MORNING WE READ TOGETHER A STATEMENT OF FAITH. SOME OF YOU MAY RECOGNIZE THE WORDS. THIS STATEMENT OF FAITH WAS CREATED IN YOUR ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS IN 1987!

STATEMENT OF FAITH - 1987

We unite in an expression of our faith. We believe in the importance of Christian fellowship as a means of support and comfort. We believe in God, the creator of all things, as revealed in the Old Testament and the New Testament – the Word of God, an all powerful, yet compassionate loving Father. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of Mary and lived to teach the Word of God. He was crucified on earth, was resurrected and ascended to Heaven to prepare a place for our life everlasting. Through Jesus' resurrection we all have a promise for eternal life. We believe the Holy Spirit is everywhere on earth, helping us identify and use our Christian gifts. The Holy Spirit stimulates us to go out into the community and the world to spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ. We believe in prayer with God as a powerful communication and a personal comforter.

EACH TIME I READ OVER THIS STATEMENT, I NOTICED OF HOW PEOPLE VIEWED THEIR FAITH. THE CLASS WAS MADE OF INDIVIDUALS, BUT THEY WORKED TOGETHER TO COME UP WITH THIS STATEMENT OF FAITH. THE WORDS ARE MEANINGFUL, AND RELAY TO US A GENUINENESS OF THEIR EXPRESSION.

THERE WAS A VERY SIMILAR EXERCISE WE WERE ASKED TO DO AT LICENSE SCHOOL BY BREAKING UP INTO SMALLER GROUPS. IN OUR GROUP THERE WAS BRAINSTORMING, BUT I WOULD CALL IT "FAITH-STORMING". WE SAT DOWN AND FIRST WROTE ALL OUR IDEAS WE WANTED TO EXPRESS IN THIS STATEMENT. WE THEN DISCOVERED THAT OTHER PEOPLE IN THE GROUP EXPRESSED OUR THOUGHT IN A DIFFERENT WAY, BETTER MAYBE AND IN LESS WORDS TOO. WE CONTINUED TO FINE TUNE OUR STATEMENT UNTIL ALL IN THE GROUP BELIEVED IT TRULY EXPRESSED THE IDEAS OF THE GROUP ON THE SUBJECT.

LOOKING BACK NOW I REALIZE THAT THE EXERCISE WAS MORE THAN THE WORDS WE PUT ON PAPER. WHAT I VENTURE TO SAY WAS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, WAS THAT WE WERE FUNCTIONING AS THAT "BODY" MENTIONED IN ROMANS 12:4-6 *"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them"*

EARLIER IN THE MONTH WE HEARD ABOUT THE **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**. WE ARE TO USE THOSE GIFTS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY. NOW THERE IS PHRASE WE HAVE ALL HEARD A NUMBER OF TIMES, BUT HAVE WE EVER HAD IT EXPLAINED TO US? IT IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OR PART OF OUR FAITH. FROM CHRIST'S BIRTH WHEN THE ANGELS SANG "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST" TO JESUS TALKING OF THE MAN BEING BLIND, NOT BECAUSE OF HIS PARENTS OR HIS SIN, BUT TO DEMONSTRATE THE POWER OF GOD AND BRING GLORY TO GOD BY IT.

JESUS EVEN TELLS US IN MATTHEW 5:16 *“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and **give glory to your Father** who is in heaven”* BUT, THAT LIGHT WHICH WE ARE TO LET SHINE OUT FROM US IS THE LIGHT OF GOD WITHIN US!!!! **IT IS GOD'S GLORY SHINING OUT THROUGH US.** IT IS NOT “OUR” GLORY BUT GOD'S THAT HE HAS PUT WITHIN US SO WE CAN HELP OTHERS AND BRING HIM THE GLORY – THE PRAISE, THE HONOR, AND THE WORSHIP.

STOP AND THINK ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND US – HIS CREATION. THE MOUNTAINS, TREES, FLOWERS, AND EVERYTHING IN IT, IT SPEAKS TO THE GLORY OF GOD. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU STOOD SOMEWHERE, MAYBE IT WAS A VIEW FROM A HIGH MOUNTAIN OR VASTNESS OF WHAT YOU WERE SEEING LIKE A WATERFALL. I SAW THAT I KNOW WHEN WE TRAVELED ON THE NORTH SIDE OF LAKE SUPERIOR AND THERE WAS THIS SINGLE RIBBON OF HIGHWAY AND WE WERE COMING DOWN. THE LANDSCAPE WAS SPREAD OUT AS FAR AS WE COULD SEE WITH THE LAKE ON OUR ONE SIDE. WHAT A SIGHT, OUR LITTLE CAR ON THIS SINGLE RIBBON OF HIGHWAY SEEMINGLY INTERRUPTING IN SUCH A VERY SMALL WAY THE VASTNESS OF GOD'S CREATION.

JUST ENVISION THAT FOR A MOMENT! YOU CAN BRIEFLY HOLD TO THE THOUGHT OF HIS GLORY IN HIS CREATION. **THE PSALMIST DESCRIBED IT MANY TIMES IN HIS WRITINGS.** LOOK AT PSALMS 8, 19, AND 139 AS THE PSALMIST DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE CREATION. FOCUSING ON A TOPIC LIKE THE GLORY OF GOD CAN AND SHOULD LIFT OUR SPIRITS AND BOOST OUR FAITH IN GOD WHO IS AS THE SONG SAYS ‘AWESOME!’ HE IS IN CONTROL OF THINGS, NO MATTER WHAT WE SEE AROUND US.

FAITH, WE HAVE HEARD THE DEFINITION SPOKEN FROM HEBREWS 1:11 *“Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.”* HERE IS A MEANINGFUL RE-WORD OF THE DEFINITION OF **FAITH** **“The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see.”** THE QUESTION IS - **“HOW DO WE, MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOW DO YOU EXPRESS FAITH?** THE PEOPLE IN THAT ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS BACK IN 1987 DID, SO LET'S LOOK AT THEIR EXPRESSION OF FAITH AND HOW IT CAN HELP US TO EXPRESS OUR FAITH.

TO BEGIN WITH THEIR FIRST WORDS SAY QUITE A LOT ABOUT THE GROUP. **WE UNITE** , THAT IS INTERESTING THAT THE GROUP BEGAN WITH THIS STATEMENT. THE BODY OF CHRIST SHOULD STRIVE FOR UNITY. WE ARE REMINDED MANY TIMES WHEN PAUL WROTE TO THE VARIOUS CHURCHES ENCOURAGING THEM TO BE IN UNITY – THAT SAMENESS WITH ONE SPIRIT, ONE LORD OF US ALL.

NEXT THE GROUP DREW ON THE **IMPORTANCE OF FELLOWSHIP FOR SUPPORT AND COMFORT.** MANY OF US CAN RECALL WHEN WE WERE IN NEED OF COMFORT OR SUPPORT, MEMBERS OF THIS BODY OF CHRIST REACHED OUT TO US. PAUL TALKED OF WHEN ONE SUFFERS WE ALL SUFFER AND WHEN ONE REJOICES WE ALL DO. IN THE BODY OF CHRIST, LIKE CENTENNIAL, THERE IS THAT BOND OF LOVE THAT BINDS US TOGETHER, DESPITE OUR DIFFERENCES.

I HAVE BROUGHT THIS UP BEFORE, BUT LOOK AROUND, WOULD YOU EVER THINK THESE ARE THE PEOPLE YOU WOULD BE SHARING ONE OF THE MOST INTIMATE EXPERIENCES WITH – WORSHIP AND TODAY COMMUNION? TODAY YOU WILL COME TO THIS TABLE FOR COMMUNION, BUT BEFORE YOU COME. WHEN YOU COME YOU ARE SAYING “I NEED FORGIVENESS” IN FRONT OF ALL YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST. WE FORGET IN OUR HASTE TO GET THROUGH COMMUNION WHAT WE ARE REALLY DOING HERE. HOWEVER, AS THIS 1987 STATEMENT SAYS THE “IMPORTANCE OF FELLOWSHIP AND SUPPORT”. THEY ARE HERE AND JESUS IS HERE TOO!!!

THAT GROUP AFFIRMED THAT **GOD CREATED ALL THINGS, NOT JUST THIS OR THAT BUT ALL THINGS**. THEY ACKNOWLEDGE **GOD IS POWERFUL, BUT COMPASSIONATE**. THERE IS A BALANCE HERE TO MAINTAIN. IF WE MAKE GOD OUT TO BE POWERFUL AND ONLY INTERESTED IN PUNISHING US THEN WE HAVE FORGOTTEN **GRACE AND FORGIVENESS**, WHICH IS FRONT AND CENTER THIS MORNING WITH COMMUNION. IF WE GO THE OTHER WAY AND MAKE GOD ALL COMPASSIONATE AND LOVING THEN WE CHEAPEN THE GRACE AND BECOME UNACCOUNTABLE TO GOD FOR WHAT WE DO – SIN. WE MUST KEEP THE BALANCE.

IN THE NEXT PARAGRAPH THE GROUP'S STATED **THEIR BELIEF, THEIR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AND WHAT HE DID FOR US**. THIS IS A VERY STRONG EXPRESSION OF THAT GROUP OF PEOPLE'S FAITH. MANY TOO, EVEN INSIDE THE CHURCH BELIEVE JESUS WAS A GOOD **MAN**, A GOOD EXAMPLE, NOTHING MORE. SON OF GOD, NO, NOT REALLY!!! RESURRECTED FROM THE DEAD, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? YOU LIVE, YOU DIE, AND THAT'S IT!!! END OF STORY. IT WAS ONLY A STORY MADE UP BY THE DISCIPLES. REALLY???

THEN MY QUESTION IS “HOW DO YOU BEGIN TO EXPLAIN NOT ONLY THE SURVIVAL OF THE CHURCH, BUT THE GROWTH AND ITS AFFECT ON MILLIONS OF PEOPLE?”. CAN IT BE PROVED BY EARTHLY MEANS, NO? BUT THEN IT CAN'T BE DISPROVED BY EARTHLY MEANS EITHER, MANY HAVE TRIED AND ENDED UP BEING CONVERTED. LAWYERS AND RESEARCHERS HAVE SET OUT TO POP THE BALLOON OF FAITH ONLY TO FAIL.

THE LAST PART OF THEIR STATEMENT TALKS ABOUT **THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS PURPOSE**. AGAIN VERY STRONG EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH THIS GROUP WAS EXPRESSING. THEIR FAITH SHOWED THEY KNOW THAT THE **BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD AND IT IS THE LIVING WORD TODAY, WAS YESTERDAY AND WILL BE TOMORROW THROUGH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**. THEY KNOW THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WITHIN US JUST AS JESUS PROMISED HE WOULD COME. THE HOLY SPIRIT WOULD BE OUR COMFORTER AND HELPER WHEN WE NEEDED HIM.

I AM NOT SURE HOW LONG THE MISSION STATEMENT HAS BEEN AROUND FOR CENTENNIAL, BUT THE GROUP KNEW WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THEY WOULD GO OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD TO SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST.

LOOK AT OUR MISSION STATEMENT AT THE TOP OF THE BULLETIN. "MAKE CHRIST KNOWN IN OUR COMMUNITY AND AROUND THE WORLD" **THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE KNEW IT WAS NOT ONLY IMPORTANT TO EXPRESS THEIR FAITH IN WORDS, BUT TO EXPRESS THEIR FAITH TO OTHERS BY THEIR ACTIONS.** THEY KNEW THE WORDS OF JAMES – *"Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. **Act on what you hear!**"*

FINALLY, THIS SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS KNEW **THE POWER OF PRAYER.** THEY STATED IN THESE WORDS, BRIEF AND CONCISE, THE MANY PARTS THAT MAKEUP PRAYER. FOR THEM IT WAS A "POWERFUL" COMMUNICATION TOOL, IT WAS A MEANS IN WHICH TO SEEK AND RECEIVE COMFORT. UNSAID, IS WHAT LIES IN BETWEEN WHAT PRAYER CAN BE OR WHAT IT CAN ACCOMPLISH.

WHAT I WOULD SUGGEST IS YOU IS TO TAKE THIS SUNDAY BULLETIN HOME AND WITH SOMEONE DISCUSS IT. **COME UP WITH YOUR OWN EXPRESSION OF FAITH.** WRITE DOWN, WHAT YOUR FAITH MEANS TO YOU. OR IF YOU ARE SO INCLINED, SIT DOWN BY YOURSELF AND THINK ABOUT YOUR FAITH AND EXPRESS IT IN WORDS ON A PIECE OF PAPER. TO SEE IT EXPRESSED IN YOUR OWN WORDS CAN BE AN UPLIFTING EXPERIENCE. IF YOU FEEL IT IS SOMETHING TO SHARE WITH ALL OF US, BRING IT NEXT WEEK AND SHARE IT WITH US DURING WORSHIP.

THIS SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS HAS SHARED WHAT THEIR FAITH HAS MEANT TO THEM AND HOPEFULLY IT HAS LIFTED YOU AND MADE YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN EXPRESSION OF FAITH.

NOW COME TO HIS TABLE, ALLOW HIM TO EXPRESS HIS GRACE AND FORGIVENESS TO YOU. AMEN.