

I feel like I am always preaching the best sermon, a shorter one of the day!

Back in January 2016 when I was planning the whole sermon schedules of the year (all the way before the ADVENT 2016), I was dreaming that our church would become the best of the best of the best churches in the world. Then I asked myself, "What does it really mean? What are we supposed to do to become the best church?" The "best" church in the world is changing the world. The best church is touching lives of the people, especially of the young people like today. This is our mission, this is who we are as the "best" church: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

What you have seen this morning is not just that 19 youth members were confirmed and professed their faith in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and joined our church with the full membership. They are actually joining one of the best missional churches around Iowa Annual Conference that I am very proud of, as we all renew our vow for our commitment to Jesus and his ministry. Just imagine that some of the confirmands may become a minister in the future. Just imagine that each one of them will impact more than one person in their lives, maybe at least ten or one hundred. Then this group of young people will be able to influence from 19, 190, to 1900 and more.

For this amazing ministry, we have so many volunteer mentors and teachers who diligently are walking along with these young people and nurturing them with love and care. Especially I deeply appreciate Pastor Becky's extraordinary leadership on this confirmation journey. We have been so blessed to have her to teach our confirmands this year with great confidence and knowledge and wisdom. Easter people, please give pastor Becky and all other volunteers your big heart of love and honor again.

The church, a community of faith, are the people of God like you and me who gather together as one body of Christ, and bring people back to God, and connect them to God's ministry. As God's people, we have high expectations for each other to become responsible Christians. Our job is to make disciples. Our job is to develop spiritual leaders of our congregation. Our job is to send those well-trained leaders to transform the world.

As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to do the ministry of Jesus Christ to the people in need. My hope for you all is that in the future some of you will be pastors, preachers, or ministers in various capacities like pastor Becky and me. And I urge the whole congregation to intentionally look for young people and nurture them to be future ministers. If we don't do that,

there would be no way to sustain our church here in Mt. Vernon. We are the teaching church: engaging the people, connecting them to God, equipping them to various ministries, and sending them forth to the world as representatives of God's kingdom for transforming the world.

My vision for UMCMV is to become a world-transforming community as follows:

- a missional church
- an inclusive church
- a discipling church
- a simple church
- a multiplying church
- a people church
- a courageous church

We are going to journey with those themes during the months of April and May. I hope this exciting sermon series will help us to become a more God-centered, world-transforming community.

Prophet Micah points out very clearly that our purpose of being the church, God's people, is not just to walk into the church building every Sunday morning and have a meaningful time with friends and families and give a gift to God, but to live out God's love in this hurting and broken world by doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

These are the three core values that help us to achieve our mission and purpose of the ministry of Jesus Christ. What is most important to us as the missional church that is willing to go out and do something for others?

First of all, "Do justice."

Justice, *mizpat* in Hebrew means something that people do for others. God is always more deeply concerned about the weak and the least among us rather than the privileged. Our work and life should be founded upon fairness and equality for all those unjustly mistreated people. Do you truly think that the world is fair to you, or life is fair anyway? Because everything is not fair to especially the underprivileged, "Doing justice" is one of the main themes throughout the Bible. God hears the cries of those slaves under the unjust regime of Pharaoh in Egypt. Slavery is one of the most terrible things in the history of humanity. Racist slavery is the most terrifying thing in the history of America. Extreme poverty and hunger are everywhere around the world, but more and more wealths are concentrated on a very few group of people.

When I was in Ghana, I quickly realized that as I looked at cities and villages, I couldn't imagine how they survived without enough water under the extremely hot and humid climate, without adequate hygiene, without paved highways, and without sufficient electric

power. And I was deeply concerned about a lack of dignity and humanity by which the people in Ghana have been challenged. The good news is God is primarily concerned about slaves in Egypt, the underprivileged, the powerless, the poor, and the weak and the least among us. That is God's justice. That is the way of doing justice.

Second, "Love kindness."

Kindness, *hesed* in Hebrew, means love, loyalty, and faithfulness. It is about building a genuine relationship with God and the people. We the church are a covenantal community in which we have covenants to keep between God and us as well as amongst us: Jesus sums up the Book of Torah with the two Greatest Commandments, "Love God and love others." The covenant keeps us in line and in a safe and sacred boundary, when you keep it with sincerity. It requires us of faithfulness and authenticity. As God is faithful, we ought to be faithful. As God never fails us, we ought not to fail God and others. To be a faithful covenantal community,

Be authentic.

Be respectful.

Third, "Walk humbly with God."

Walking, *halak* in Hebrew, means to put God first to live in conformity with God's will. This is the way of doing our daily spiritual formation. Who is your faithful constant companion in this faith journey? It could be your spouses and children, your colleagues, your friends, and those people that you are encountering with daily. But the most important lifelong companion in this journey is God. No matter where you are at right now physically and spiritually, you are not alone because you walk humbly with God, and God is always with you on this journey.

Our core values to become a world-transforming community are:

Mizphat (justice)

Hesed (faithfulness, love, loyalty)

Halak (spiritual transformation in God)

That is the most important reason why you are sitting here to worship God. This is why you want to be a missional church as the world-transforming community. Go out to the world and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Let us pray:

God of love and justice, we give you thanks and praises for this opportunity to celebrate the confirmation service for 19 young members of our church. Empower them and encourage them to be the church to the world. Guide them to be a beacon of hope for the future. As we nurture them to grow spiritually, may we also become the missional church

to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.