



Thoughts on the Journey...

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There have been several times in my life when I have participated in the process of developing mission statements for organizations and ministries. With several heads pulled together, a com-

mittee of people would meet to fashion a statement that declares the organization's purpose and focus. It sounds like an easy chore, but when folks bring their own vision and values to the table, the task can be daunting. I remember one mission statement in particular that was an exercise in absolute frustration. It took months to write and, when all was said and done, really didn't capture much of anything other than pulling words together that sounded good on paper. It was like a useless knickknack collecting dust; it had no purpose other than to embellish the cover of their brochures. Over time, I began to have a cynical opinion of mission statements... until now.

Last week, I attended a ministry meeting related to our El Salvador Ministry. As we were discussing our future course, parishioner Jim Lewis shared with us a remarkable experience he had with his wife Barb and how her personal mission statement changed their life "on a dime". Jim was a successful attorney and Barb was just finishing her PhD. In an effort to figure out the direction of her career path, Barb began reading *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* along with several other books hoping to get direction. On the advice of these books, Barb thought it would be helpful to develop her own mission statement.

Jim, in joking fashion, would periodically poke fun at Barb's undertaking. When she completed her task, Jim requested to see the end result. As he read her mission statement, it confirmed for him the values they shared as a couple and was gratified by their mutual sense of priorities. All the words on the page were matching with his sense of purpose and direction until he reached the end of the statement, where it read, "Go to Latin America and help people who can't help themselves". Those words took a leap off the page and astonished him. Jim turned to Barb and asked, "Where did this come from?" and Barb replied, "Don't you remember, Jim? This was *your* dream back in college." This mission statement of Barb's immediately changed their lives and they embarked on an incredible journey that took them to Costa Rica. They built a home there on a mountain and became part of the people's lives doing what they could to help the people help themselves. They participated in building a road for easy passage on the mountain; they brought electricity to their neighbors; they worked with

the people to build a new church; they purchased a native tree to make the pews for the church - and the list goes on. Perhaps the most beautiful aspect of their mission, was that they let the Holy Spirit guide their journey. As a result, the Spirit took them to people, places, and events that re-routed their life direction and transformed their lives.

In the Gospel of Luke this week, Luke compiles the sequence of events, in the life of Jesus, as handed down from eyewitnesses. He tells of Jesus in the temple in Nazareth where he read from the scroll a passage from the Prophet Isaiah.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord..."

Jesus said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

And there it is! Jesus' Mission statement. With the blessing of the Holy Spirit, our Lord summarizes the heart and soul of his purpose on earth: ***to bring glad tidings to the poor*** - the poor, physically, spiritually, socially, mentally; ***proclaim liberty to captives*** - those held hostage by sin and the snare of Satan; ***recovery of sight to the blind*** - bring about a vision of life beyond the darkness of this world; ***to let the oppressed go free*** - freedom to rise above those who keep us restrained and imprisoned in chaos so that we are truly free to give our life to Jesus. It is all part of Jesus' mission of salvation.

Last week's segment in our parish-wide Wild Goose series was all about leaving the comfort of our *locked rooms* and living our faith with gusto. In order to do that, our personal mission statement should look a lot like Christ's. It requires shedding our fear, ramping up our trust in the Spirit, and taking our mission out in the world, whether that be our own home, the community, Latin America - anywhere and everywhere we are.

Barb & Jim Lewis' mission of action has inspired me! That's the work of the Holy Spirit helping me grow in faith by the witness of others. It motivated me to critically look at my own life's mission and ask the tough questions: Am I living in fear in a locked room with a lifeless mission? Am I taking Christ's gospel to heart? Do I trust that the Holy Spirit will give me everything I need to do his Father's will and to live my faith with gusto? It's time to take a leap of faith!