

Last Sunday, we began a sermon series that gets to the heart of what congregational renewal is.

The series is called PAWN – an acronym for Purpose, Assets, Wows!, and Needs.

1. The first step is recognizing and committing to our God-given purpose.
2. Then, we consider what God has given us to carry out that purpose, our assets;
3. We see how God is actively working through us to make his kingdom known, the Wows!
4. And finally, we ask God for what we need to get the job done.

Purpose, Assets, Wows! and Needs.

As we did last week, today we will focus on the P – our purpose as Christians and as a congregation of Christians.

Baptism in water and the Holy Spirit is where it all starts for us –and for every disciple of Jesus.

From the day of our baptism on, we are immersed in the life of God – the Father, Son, and Holy Trinity.

We live in this world as citizens of God's realm.

The Lord and Master, Jesus himself, gave us our purpose – told us what we are to be doing:

Making Disciples by Baptizing them and teaching them Jesus' way.

That is our whole purpose as the church.

Everything we do is to **lead people to Jesus** so that they, too, can be baptized, immersed in the life of Jesus.

And then we are to **teach them how to live this new life** in God's Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, we associate this with programs –

- new member classes,
- Sunday School,
- service projects
- or special groups.

And certainly, such programs help us to fulfill God's purpose for us to make disciples.

But the programs are secondary.

They are not where we should spend the bulk of our time, energy, and resources.

What is primary

– what comes first, what is our *priority* as the church of Jesus Christ

– is to **form community**

– **to be in relationship with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.**

Jesus set the example as he called disciples like Philip to follow him and become a community of faith and practice.

Jesus and his disciples formed the community in which

- God's life is lived,
- salvation and mercy is experienced,
- and each person contributes to the life of the whole community.

When we consider how to fulfil God's purpose, we imitate Jesus' example.

We focus our time and energy on being a community that lives the life Jesus lived.

This means eagerly spending time together with Jesus as a congregation,

- worshiping together,
- praying together,
- sharing our burdens together,
- serving together,

- studying God's Word together,
- caring for one another as Jesus cares for us.

This means being united in our desire to please God above all else.

Like Samuel, we say to God each day

– Here I am Lord. Speak, and your servant will listen.

Forming Christian community means fastening our hearts on others and seeking their eternal welfare.

Like Philip, we take every opportunity to invite others into the community of faith, saying “Come and see Jesus”.

We are surrounded by “Nathaniels” who don't know Jesus – people we can invite to come with us and meet him.

Jesus is who we are all about!

Jesus is the heart and the head of the church, the community of faith.

Without Jesus, there is no church,

but only groups of people who function as religious social clubs with service projects.

And sadly, there are many of those, especially in prosperous western countries, and they are dying right and left.

- These are the places where people come to check off their 1 hour a week or 1 day a year with God and then scurry off to other pursuits
- where people come primarily for their friends, paying little attention to the scriptures, hymns, sermons and prayers through which God speaks to them
- where people come to consume religion, seeking only what makes them happy and disappearing when they don't like something.
- Where people give in order to get something in return rather than to give thanks to God the Giver.

Without Jesus, there is no church, no discipleship, no salvation.

But we have been called and chosen,

gathered, enlightened

and made holy

to be Jesus' followers, his community of disciples.

Discipleship is being the community of faith centered on Jesus, following Jesus as Lord and Master,

and fulfilling the purpose of making more disciples of Jesus.

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Where people gather around Jesus,

- they see the heavens open and the messengers of God focused on Jesus.
- They see their own salvation hanging on the cross
- They see their eternal future bound up with the Messiah who died and rose from the dead.
- They don't want to be apart from Him or each other.
- There is nothing more important, more inviolate, than time spent with Jesus.

The purpose of the Christ-centered church is to lead people to Jesus.

To invite people to come and see the One the Bible tells of,

To invite people to experience the Savior who forgives sins, who has mercy on the repentant, who heals the sick and broken-hearted.

To invite them to be the ones Jesus delivers from sins and feeds with his own sacrificed self.

To welcome people into a community in which they are valued and loved because Jesus values and loves them.

It is tempting to invite people to come and See something other than Jesus:

- the great preacher

- the wonderful youth group
- the great seniors program
- the beautiful building
- the superb music

And even if all these good things are true – they are not the main thing.

None of them has the power to save or heal or forgive.

None of them knows us through and through and still loves us.

None of them lasts forever.

Only Jesus has that deep love for us and for all people.

So, let us invite people to come and see Jesus –

To come and belong in a community where Jesus is the pulsing heart
and blazing soul,

giving life to those around him.

And then we make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them.

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Fulfilling our purpose as the church is not the pastor's job,

or the bishops' job,

but **the work of whole congregations** –

**striving together with one heart and mind filled with the Holy
Spirit of Jesus, risen from the dead!**

Let us begin by finishing this message together.

Choose a partner – preferably someone not in your immediate family – get up as needed – and talk together about 2 questions.

1. How do you experience Jesus in the community of disciples called St. Peter's?
2. How will you invite someone this week to “come and see Jesus”?

(allow time and then ask for sharing)

I invite you to Place a hand on the other's head while I pray.

Gracious God, bless these disciples you have gathered around your Son Jesus. Keep their hearts and eyes open to the presence of Jesus in their lives. Send your Spirit to help them grow in faith and love. Make them bold and give them courage to invite others into the presence of Jesus the Savior, in whose name we pray.
Amen

P.A.W.N. Message Series – January 2018

P = Purpose

Baptism is foremost to our purpose as Christians. **To be baptized is to be changed by God to live a new life.** Our purpose as individual Christians is **to live God's life** as we discover it in the Bible and in the **Jesus community** called the church.

The purpose of the *church* is given by Jesus:

*¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, **go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** Matthew 28:18-20 NLT*

Everything we are as the church is to **lead people to Jesus** so that they, too, can be baptized, immersed in the life of the triune God. And then we **teach them how to live this new life** in God's Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you experience Jesus in the community of disciples called St. Peter's?
2. How will you invite someone this week to "come and see Jesus"?