

“Risk-Taking Mission and Service”

Date: Sept. 29, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Luke 6:32-36; Luke 9:23-25

Occasion: Spiritual Gifts series

Theme: Mission, service

Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Risk-Taking Mission and Service. They do not only what it takes to maintain the congregation, but they are also reaching out into the community with love and service. They're willing to stretch their comfort zones, to do things that may not yet be familiar. They're willing to die to their pride and their complacency with the status quo, and they're willing to serve others, whether or not they will ever become a member of the church.

Ordinary Christian service takes many forms, and we've talked about a lot of them over the past several weeks. Ordinary service includes such things as being willing to usher, assist in the kitchen, serve on church committees, teach Sunday school, take gifts to first-time visitors and help clean up around the church.

The operation of a local church requires such a helpful and cooperative spirit of those who love the church and want to see it run smoothly and effectively. Basic service builds the Body of Christ, and it falls upon *all* of the members of a church to use their talents and energy in service. We have many such wonderful people here at Lakewood.

The word mission turns church service outward. Mission reminds us that the church does not exist for itself, but rather Christ's compassion, grace, mercy and love should extend to the entire world. Mission refers to the positive difference made in the lives of people beyond the inner circle of the church.

Mission spreads the faith by exemplifying the compassion, mercy, love and grace of Jesus in the world. For many churches, such work involves outreach into their community through donations to the local food pantry, CROP Walk, or ministries to the homeless, such as EUMA. They collect gloves and scarves, warm hats and coats for the needy in the winter. Churches support other missions, even some around the world, such as our support of several students attending school in Paraguay.

Nearly every congregation supports or offers some level of mission, relying upon the volunteer help and financial generosity of its members. The life of service flows naturally from the teachings of Jesus Christ, and no congregation can avoid the direct command of Christ to love and serve others.

Well, if mission and service describe so many of our congregations, why do we want to qualify them with the adjective of *risk-taking*? Well, vibrant, fruitful and growing congregations push beyond ordinary service and everyday missions, to offer extraordinary opportunities for life-changing engagement with people.

Risk-taking mission and service takes people into ministries that push them out of their comfort zones, beyond the circle of relationships and practices that seem so familiar to them. God asks people to step out, beyond what they would ordinarily do, in order to trust Him more. And, amazing thing happens. People are transformed - both those who serve and the people they serve.

We have two testimonies this morning from people who have stepped out of their comfort zones and are involved in such risk-taking ministries.

8:30: Roger Pike – Kairos; Suzie Rosendahl – Produce Express

11:00 Brad Enterline – Kairos; Pam Anthony – Produce Express

Risk-Taking Mission and Service involves work that stretches people, causing them to do something for the good of others they never would have considered doing, had it not been for their relationship with Jesus Christ. In today's Gospel lesson in Luke 6, Jesus tells us that simply loving the people who already love us is no big deal.

The harder challenge, the one that clearly identifies us as being followers of Jesus, is when we choose to love people we don't know, or people we might feel uncomfortable around, or even someone who hates us. That kind of love is not easy. But Jesus challenges us to take the risk if we are to truly be his followers.

May God give to each of us the courage and the willingness to listen for his invitation, and to say Yes when he calls us. Amen? Amen!

Much of this sermon borrows from Robert Schnase's book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007, pp.83-100.