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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
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Psalm 98 and Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20
"The Fullness of Faith"

The sermon today is the third and last in the series I have spoken in my final sermons here at Redwoods Presbyterian Church. The first sermon was theological in that it spoke about God. The second was ecclesiastical in that it focused on the church. The third, today's sermon, is missiological in that it addresses the mission of the church.

Mission is what we as Christians are primarily about. It is how we communicate the good news of the gospel to a world that needs it; how we love God with all our heart, mind and soul and how we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Mission is best exemplified in Jesus's final iconic words to his disciples in Matthew's Gospel. He says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20). The following passage from the Acts of the Apostles complements these words by Jesus: "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8).

Every mission enterprise in the world has taken these statements as their *raison d'être*, their reason for being, or their *raison de vivre*, their reason for action.

We all have an image of Christ's mission to the world – some of it positive and some negative. We see the negative when the church aligned itself with colonial powers to oppress indigenous populations for financial gain. We see the positive when the church went into the entire world and sensitively shared the good news of the gospel and people could choose to accept the message. An excellent depiction of this dynamic is shown in the movie "The Mission" starring Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons.

Many excellent personnel in foreign contexts have emerged as a result of missions abroad, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, from South Africa, and Oscar Romero, of El Salvador.

The best kind of mission to the world follows this formula: The Gospel plus culture accepted by faith equals Christianity where culture accepts, articulates and celebrates

the Gospel. The Gospel in turn critiques culture when culture doesn't meet caring and compassionate criteria. The trouble with some missions is that Christianity which is the sum of European or US American gospel and culture is imposed on foreign cultures. Indigenous people were told to give up many meaningful cultural practices like dancing and to wear black suits and white shirts. Thankfully, we've moved beyond this kind of cultural imperialism in our mission endeavors.

This formula is good even for the expression of the gospel in our context and that's why our denomination constantly updates our hymnal. We affirm the classics and introduce songs that newer and younger people identify with. We must understand our culture, the themes and memes, and somehow communicate the gospel through these powerful cultural elements. I'm leaving that to the future of the church while I continue to enjoy my faith and culture in ways that I already do through good books, current affairs (news media), movies, art, music, theatre and politics – and other ways to which God will call me.

Missiology is the study of the church's mission and it is an exciting and dynamic field to follow. I like to look at mission through the lens of The Brief Statement of Faith of our denomination. I cannot emphasize it enough. We already read it together in the café service and I bring it to you again today to press home what it calls us to be and do as Christians.

Every Christian in this sanctuary and world has been baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Brief Statement of Faith tells us what that means for us and provides the challenge for us to be God's persons in the world. It expresses the fullness of faith.

Everything we read in that statement is the reason for our being and action, in other words, it calls us to be God's missionaries in the world and our world in particular. Mission is not only to foreign lands. It is to lands at home which in some ways strike us as foreign.

Our immediate world in need is also so familiar that we fail to see what is there like the person sitting on a park bench or in the corner of the room. Folk rock singer Dan Bern sings about losing his father when he was age 22 and being "lost and crazy lonesome like a plane with no place to land." How many people in our society are lost and lonely and how available are we to these people to lend a listening ear or to be a friend?

Suellen and I enquired of a woman in San Francisco last week about catching a bus. She outlined the routine and said it would cost \$2.25 in exact change. After a friendly conversation, she pulled from her purse a pamphlet and encouraged us to go to the website printed on the pamphlet which read JW.org. I immediately recognized it as Jehovah's Witness and mentioned we were Presbyterians. She gave us a quarter each

to add to our paper dollars and insisted we take it. If I was not a strong adherent of my faith I would have wanted to know more about Jehovah's Witness simply because of this woman and her kindness. I went to the website and could see how it would appeal to people.

From my perspective, the Presbyterian pcusa.org website provides a better and more holistic expression and celebration of the church and its mission, from worship, to Bible and theological studies, to proclaiming the good news at home and abroad: gardening, medicine, social advocacy, and much more. Let's tell people about *our* website.

Evangelism is an expression of mission and mostly it is done with caring, compassion and kindness. It is communicated by word and deed.

As we did in the café service let us read together the Brief Statement of Faith. I'll read the opening lines (number 1-6) and then we will read together the statements on Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit in parts. After each affirmation I'll stop for a brief period of silence. In the silence, reflect on what we just read and see how God is calling you to action or simply be silent before God. I'll close with lines 77-79 and we all will say the final line. I'll indicate the number of the lines we'll read together as we go along.

By the way, this is not my last sermon. That will be on August 28. It will be part sermon and part affirmation and thanksgiving.

Lines 1-6 – Cornel

Bold letters 10.2, Lines 7-26 – All, then silence

Bold letters 10.3, Lines 27-51 – All, then silence

Bold letters 10.4, Lines 52-76 – All, then silence

Bold letters 10.5, Lines 77-79 – Cornel

Bold letters 10.6, Lines 7-26 – All

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH*

1 In life and in death we belong to God.
 2 Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 3 the love of God,
 4 and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
 5 we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
 6 whom alone we worship and serve.

10.2

7 We trust in Jesus Christ,
 8 fully human, fully God.
 9 Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
 10 preaching good news to the poor
 11 and release to the captives,
 12 teaching by word and deed
 13 and blessing the children,

14 healing the sick
 15 and binding up the brokenhearted,
 16 eating with outcasts,
 17 forgiving sinners,
 18 and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
 19 Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
 20 Jesus was crucified,
 21 suffering the depths of human pain
 22 and giving his life for the sins of the world.
 23 God raised this Jesus from the dead,
 24 vindicating his sinless life,
 25 breaking the power of sin and evil,
 26 delivering us from death to life eternal.

10.3

27 We trust in God,
 28 whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
 29 In sovereign love God created the world good
 30 and makes everyone equally in God's image,
 31 male and female, of every race and people,
 32 to live as one community.
 33 But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
 34 Ignoring God's commandments.
 35 we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
 36 accept lies as truth,
 37 exploit neighbor and nature,
 38 and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
 39 We deserve God's condemnation.
 40 Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
 41 In everlasting love,

10.3--6 THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS

42 the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
 43 to bless all families of the earth.
 44 Hearing their cry,
 45 God delivered the children of Israel
 46 from the house of bondage.
 47 Loving us still,
 48 God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
 49 Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
 50 like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
 51 God is faithful still.

10.4

52 We trust in God the Holy Spirit
 53 everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
 54 The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
 55 sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
 56 and binds us together with all believers
 57 in the one body of Christ, the Church.
 58 The same Spirit
 59 who inspired the prophets and apostles
 60 rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
 61 engages us through the Word proclaimed,
 62 claims us in the waters of baptism,
 63 feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
 64 and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.
 65 In a broken and fearful world
 66 the Spirit gives us courage

67 to pray without ceasing,
68 to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
69 to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
70 to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
71 and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
72 In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
73 we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
74 and to live holy and joyful lives,
75 even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
76 praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

10.5

77 With believers in every time and place,
78 we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
79 can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

10.6

80 Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*From the PC(USA) Book of Confessions