

Sermon: To love, to follow, and to listen
11 Pentecost, Year C
Isaiah 58:9b-14

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Last January we held a leadership retreat here at Emmanuel in this same space to consider the mission of Emmanuel Church. The snow was coming down and yet still 30+ of our leaders showed up to talk about who we are as a parish, what our values are, where we are heading. We asked questions such as where is our energy, what brings us joy as a church? Where might the Holy Spirit be leading us? What is God calling us to do? All of our efforts required a deep listening to what God might be saying to us through each other. A group of about five committed to taking the plethora of notes on big sheets of paper and writing out what Emmanuel's values, our vision and our mission might be.

I'd like to share with you the values that emerged. These five major points include:

1. Our parish is a **family**, and we take responsibility for the well being of all its members.
2. We celebrate the Lord's presence in our **inter-generational** connections, from the laughter of our children to the dignity of our elders and the memory of those who have gone before us.
3. We seek **God's face beyond our doors** in people of any religion and no religion, in our local and global neighborhoods, who may be poor, hungry or imprisoned.
4. We honor our **traditions**, yet they do not constrain us. We take God very seriously but ourselves much less seriously. We **improvise** as needed and are willing to try new things.
5. We are committed to the strong **lay** engagement *and leadership* that have defined this parish.

I hope for many of you, at least those who have been around for a while, this sounds like Emmanuel to you. Our values are what make us who we are.

Next, I want to share our vision statement, which is what we hope to create. You have seen this on the cover of your bulletins over the past few months: *We strive to be a community of faith where all are welcome just as they are; a place where every person feels safe, accepted, and loved as a child of God.* Does this sound like us? I believe it does. This is what we hope to create, what we strive for.

And finally I want to share with you what we believe our *mission* to be. In our catechism in the Book of Common Prayer, the mission of the Church is defined as, "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." Yet each individual church, each body of faith has a more unique calling. Why are we, Emmanuel Church, here? What is God asking *us* to do? This is what we came up with:

- 1. To love and serve God with joy and action**
- 2. To follow Jesus and see him in the faces of our neighbors.**
- 3. To listen for the Spirit and respond to God's nudges.**

We do this through:

Liturgy and music

Prayer and discernment

Fellowship and support

Promotion of social justice locally and globally

Today I am happy to present to you a couple of tangible reminders of our mission. Our acolytes and ushers will distribute a rack card to you now. While they do this, may I ask everyone to stand who either showed up for the leadership retreat, participated in the writing of these statements and/or helped create the card? This reminds us of the importance of participation in the life of the church so that we can go where God sends us. The BCP reminds us that the church carries out its mission through the ministry of *all* its members. All its members. This means that each of you who considers yourself a part of this church has an opportunity and a responsibility to participate in the life of the church. Not all of us are called to do everything that the church does, which is a relief! But all of us are called to do *something* that is part of God's mission for us.

Now that you have the cards in front of you, please take a look at them and see where you see yourself. (Hoping for audience participation here!) Is there a word that seems highlighted to you? Is there something you see that brought you here to Emmanuel? That keeps you here? Is there something there you hadn't really thought about before? Which part seems easy? Not so easy? Which do you naturally gravitate toward? Bring you joy? Anything scare you?

The world can be a frightening and treacherous place at times. We see such brokenness in our lives, both on a personal level and in the wider world. The powers of darkness can sometimes tempt us to despair. But our Isaiah reading reminds us that if we do the work of God, show mercy and love in the world, we actually cause darkness to flee, we can be repairers of the breach, and we can satisfy needs in parched places.

Our mission reminds us to live out the essentials in our faith: to love and serve God with joy and action, to follow Jesus and see him in the faces of our neighbors and to listen for the Spirit and respond with courage to God's nudges.

Take these cards home today. And read them throughout the week. Pray with them. Ask God how you might be best involved in the mission of this church. If you are already maxed out in participation, take a rest! Pray to be open to the many ways God can use you! Both you as an individual and you as a part of this church. The world needs God's love that shines through you. Amen.