

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Sunday, May 5, 2024
Mission Statement Reveal: Nurture

Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him—strengthened in the faith just as you were taught. Amen.

Our Mission: To Nurture

Dear friends in Christ,

Along with the worship folder today you received this green insert. I invite you to take that out now to follow along and to fill in some of the blanks or take other notes as we look at God's Word this morning. You can use a pen from the seat pocket in front of you.

This is our second Sunday where we look at our new mission statement at Peace Lutheran Ministries. Last week, Pastor Werre told us why we use mission statements, why we needed a new mission statement and how we came up with it.

If you were not here last week, I strongly encourage you to watch a recording of that service, especially the sermon. The information you need to access a recording online is included under the "Review" section of the insert.

Let me just say this for review. We wanted just one mission statement to unite all our ministries, one that would not be brief and memorable. Our new statement is brief: just one sentence, with three key verbs.

I have some evidence that our new mission statement is also memorable. This past week I spoke with a member who had missed the service due to health issues, but later watched it online. He rattled off our new mission statement easily: ***Peace Lutheran Ministries Cultivates and Nurtures faith to Flourish in the peace of Christ.*** (And no, I wasn't quizzing him, he brought it up in conversation).

These words: **Cultivate, Nurture and Flourish** speaks to everything we want to do at Peace. However, as we heard last week and can see in that first box, **Cultivate** especially speaks to the work of our **Early Childhood Center**. **Nurture** speaks especially to our **Lutheran Elementary School**. You could put **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** in that second box. The word **Flourish** especially speaks to our **Congregation in general** - you could simply put **CONGREGATION** in the last blank in the box.

Today, we focus on the word **NURTURE**. **Nurture** is the natural follow up to **Cultivate**. If you want to grow a plant or tree, you start with the seed. When you **cultivate** – you get the soil ready and you plant the seed.

The same is true with the kingdom of God. The Gospel – the good news of Jesus' saving work is the seed that grows faith in human hearts.

At Peace we **cultivate** faith by planting the seed of the gospel in infants and little children through baptism and through teaching the youngest of children in our early childhood center.

We plant, but the Bible tells us **It is God who causes the growth**. The Holy Spirit uses the gospel to create faith in Christ.

If you are growing a garden, you **cultivate** - you put the seed into the soil. But you don't stop there. Young plants need ongoing care. They need light, water, nutrients so that they grow and their root sink in deep. They need **nurture**.

The Apostle Paul tells us the same is true with faith as we see in that first passage: **Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, *continue to walk in him, by being rooted and built up in him, and strengthened in the faith just as you were taught.***

So, to fill in the statement, Roman Numeral I: BELIEVERS, LIKE PLANTS NEED **NURTURE** – **Nurture** goes in the blank.

How is faith **nurtured**? By the same way faith is created –the Holy Spirit works through the gospel message in Word and Sacrament – that is Bible, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. After all, Scripture says: **faith comes from hearing the message... about Christ.** (Ro 1:17) Last week we heard the prophet Isaiah tell us how just as rain from heaven makes things grow, so does Go's Word. So our next point:

+The Holy Spirit nurtures faith through the gospel.

Why does faith need to be rooted in Jesus through His Word? It is for the same reason there are trays of plants on my summer porch right now. My wife started them from seeds under nice warm grow lights, but now they'll soon be going out into the Wisconsin weather with all the unknowns. To be ready for cold nights and cloudy days, those plants are now nurtured on the porch, still sheltered, but being **built up** for harder days ahead.

Our lesson from Ecclesiastes tells us something similar. There will be hard days in this life for the believer, including challenges of old age and the certainty of death. Therefore, Solomon said: **remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the bad days come.**

Only hearing and learning about our Creator and Savior God's love and care of us, can we begin to ready for the difficulties and sufferings that will come into the Christian's life. Only the **Creator** is able to sustain you through the darkest valleys and bring you to His eternal presence through the gracious promises that you know He will keep because He sent Jesus to save you.

So, the next point reads: + **God's Word prepares us for BAD DAYS**

You also nurture plants by protecting them from weeds that would choke them out and from deer and rabbits that would devour them.

Christians face far worse than rabbits. 1 Peter 5 says: **The Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (8).**

Satan and his allies in the unbelieving world and our own sinful natures, will use all kinds of traps and tricks that go against Jesus and His Word. Therefore God's Word in Colossians warns us: **See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, which are in accord with human tradition, namely, the basic principles of the world, but not in accord with Christ.**

So, another reason to **NURTURE** faith, is because +**God's Word GUARDS us against the devil's attacks. GUARDS goes in the blank.**

Clearly God teaches us it is important to continue to **NURTURE** faith. Therefore, a major portion of our work at Peace involves nurturing and building up the faith of those who have been brought to faith in Jesus through all the ways we teach, preach, study and share the Word.

One major portion of our ministry together is especially focused on **NURTURE**: our Lutheran Elementary School.

II. OUR LUTHERAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NURTURES FAITH in many ways.

+God's Word is the foundation and the priority – from classroom discipline to how we view the world.

+Not just teachers but *gospel ministers*.

Yes, our teachers and curricula do an outstanding job of getting our students ready for high school and helping prepare them for life, but first and foremost our teachers are gospel ministers. At our WELS college of ministry, they have been thoroughly instructed in God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions that testify to the Gospel.

Our teachers and pastors warn students against Satan's lies and the temptations of the unbelieving world – from the **empty deceit** of evolutionary thinking to the ungodly **principles of the world** that would teach you to seek meaning, identity and ultimate satisfaction in anything other than Jesus Christ alone.

Peace School is not a private school that happens to be connected to a church but a ministry that proclaims God's Word so that our children will **remember (their) creator in the days of (their) youth** and stay **rooted** in and living for Christ throughout life!

Yes, **Nurture** is at the heart of the mission of our elementary school. But **nurturing faith** dare not be limited to only the school and the children. We all need to keep growing in God's Word!

After all, plants need water, light and nutrients not just when they are young, but also when they are mature. It doesn't matter how old, how well rooted and established a plant is, if you take away light and water, if it is not **nurtured**, it will die.

In the same way, **nurturing** faith through God's Word must not at confirmation, just as it cannot stop after a Lutheran high school or even a Lutheran college or seminary! If our faith is not **nurtured** and **strengthened** by Word and Sacrament, then our faith will grow unfruitful, sick and finally die.

We all know this. We've heard Jesus warn us about it in the parable of the Sower where he talked about the devil stealing away faith or the cares of the world choking faith out. Jesus has also given us the solution: **So listen carefully!**

But even though we know all this, still because of our sinful nature we don't act like it's true that Jesus' Word is the one thing needed. We don't always act like the message of the Gospel is the only thing that will save us on the day when our bodies return to **dust** and our **spirits** go to God to be judged. Our sin is the reason we are not more eager to hear, read, learn and remember God's Word and eagerly teach and share it with our families, friends and neighbors.

The fact is, if we were saved by how well we have heard, read, learned and given the Bible our undivided attention – none of us would be saved, especially not this preacher!

So let **listen carefully** to God's Word when it tells us to **repent**. Let us admit this sin, your sin, my sin, that rarely do we take care of our faith the way that we ought.

And then listen again to our first lesson: **Remember your Creator.**

The Lord not only **created** our body and soul and all that exists, but He is also the **Creator** and Sustainer of saving faith in Jesus Christ. He is the one who **Created** the rescue from sin we so desperately need by sending the God-Man, Jesus Christ who lived, died and rose from the dead to rescue the world of sinners.

But the Lord didn't just send Jesus, He also saw to it you were personally and intimately linked you to Jesus' saving work in Baptism, just as our second lesson declares: **You were buried with Christ in baptism. And in baptism you were also raised with him through the faith worked by the God who raised Christ from the dead.**

Christ came into this world to pay for our sins and bring us peace with God. His life, His death, and His resurrection are now yours through God's promise that you were joined to Jesus' death and raised to life with Christ in baptism. Simply put, joined to Jesus through Spirit given faith, everything Jesus did and won is now yours.

The payment Christ made by suffering hell and giving His life on the cross to set you right with God, it is yours – you are forgiven of every sin! He even forgives our foolish neglect of His word!

Indeed, the holy life Jesus lived as the innocent One to save us – a life filled with hearing and learning God's Word with all His heart and mind, just as He did in the temple courts when He was twelve years old – that life – blameless with the record of Jesus' perfection is yours.

That means in the eyes of God you are perfect and blameless – all and only through Jesus. Since you have been **buried and raised with Christ**, you can be certain that He will bring you to what His death and resurrection purchased: eternal life in the joy and glory of the world to come – welcomed into the Father's mansions and even your body raised up on the last day to **be like** Jesus' resurrected, **glorious** and undying **body!** (Philippians 3:21)

And since you are already **raised with Christ**, you have a new life in Him and through Him. God has given you a new self that is able to battle against sinful desires and mixed-up priorities and to instead hear and learn His Word so that we are **rooted** and **built up** in Christ. Let us embrace our mission together to **nurture faith in the peace of Christ.** *God help us do it!* Amen.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.