

GRAY MATTERS

The Four Pillars of the Church - Part Two

In my last Gray Matters blog, I introduced the four indispensable pillars of the church that comprise the work and ministry of the church: Mission, Worship, Discipleship, and Fellowship. These pillars rest on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets with Jesus Christ as the Chief Cornerstone, according to Ephesians 2:20.

I mentioned how these pillars have become disordered since the time when Christianity became the official religion of Rome, with Worship becoming the pillar upon which all the other pillars have become aligned. Previous to this, Mission had always been the main pillar upon which all the others were aligned. This has also been the case in all the major revivals that God has sent us throughout history.

While worship is important and one of the greatest things we can do as the church; when it is the aligning pillar, the church building becomes the center of operations and the focus of our attention. This is the way it has been for nearly two of millennia of Christendom. We have depended on bringing people into the church to be like us – to worship like us, to hear our preaching, and to eventually become like us – Christians who are inwardly focused on our life together in God.

The reality we face in this post-Christian world, that has sprung up around us, is that fewer people are coming to church, having their lives wrapped up in other things. Therefore, having the local church building as the center of our attention and ministry keeps us from reaching those who would never even consider coming to a church worship service.

Many believers these days are talking about our need to become more missional – to recognize that our God is a missional God and that he is calling us to be a missional church. To be missional simply means that we place the pillar of mission back in its rightful place to be that pillar upon which all other of the foundational pillars are aligned.

When we organize our structure around mission; worship, discipleship, and fellowship remain a vital part of who we are and what we do, but they begin to focus us outwardly to the needs of the world, rather than inwardly to our personal comfort. With mission in the lead position, we can no longer compartmentalize our lives to have a church part and a secular part. Worship, discipleship, and fellowship are then experienced in the totality of our lives as we discover a vision that is located in the context of the world that God has sent us to serve, rather than in a building or in an institution.

We are a vital part of God's mission to the world. The question is: Will we fulfill the mission to which God has sent us or will we continue to focus inwardly on ourselves, our comfort, and what makes us feel cared for, instead of fulfilling God's purpose for putting us here?

Our God is, and has always been missional in his purposes; from his creation of the world for the human race to inhabit, to the different covenants he has made with his people to be his hand extended to all, to the myriad prophets he has sent to exhort us to turn from our selfish ways and get back to the business of missional ministry, to the sending of his only begotten Son into the world to open the way of salvation to all who will respond to his call.

If God's first, and foremost, work is mission, shouldn't we also make it ours? When our worship becomes missional, we begin to take it to the community that surrounds us – to make a joyful noise in the world and to show and tell the love of Christ to all.

When our discipleship becomes missional, we stop making members who simply fill pews on Sunday mornings and positions on committees. Instead we begin to make true disciples, equipping men, women, and children to obey Christ's commission to "Go into all the world and make disciples of all people, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that

Jesus has commanded – making even more disciples for even more service in the world.

When our fellowship becomes missional, we begin to celebrate our relationships in a way that includes the outsiders and creates venues for us to engage our mutual faith friendships with every part of our lives, rather than just on Sunday morning.

I believe that God is challenging us to align the whole ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Holly on the pillar of mission, that we may be thoroughly equipped to reach a world in great need. Will we take the challenge?