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*“Our Mission”*

MATTHEW 28:18-20

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WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

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## AT A GLANCE

What is the mission of Wildwood Church? It's the mission of every church since Jesus left. It's the Great Commission! Listen to how we believe the Lord would have us fulfill the Great Commission in our specific time and location.

## INTRODUCTION

What is the mission of Wildwood Church? It is the mission of every church of all time. It's called the Great Commission and we find our divine mission given to us by King Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20.

**And Jesus came and said to them, “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

The mission of Wildwood Church is to go all over the world and make obedient disciples who go all over the world and make obedient disciples, and on and on until Jesus comes back.

## A LOT OF LEEWAY

There's a lot of leeway in the things we can do to make this happen, but there's no denying our primary task. This ought to motivate everything we ever do because it's the only thing that will last. If we do everything but this, we're not really Christ's church. If we do nothing but this, I believe we'll hear, “Well done good and faithful servants.”

Over the next five weeks we're going to explore what we believe the Lord has called Wildwood Church to do, to be, and to pursue. We've called the series, “The Way Forward.”

Over the last several years we've worked to identify our mission, our vision, our strategy, and our core values. When I say, “Our” I don't mean like *our possessions*, like we've come up with something new. I mean these are *our responsibility*. We believe the Lord has given these to us and by His grace, we faithfully pursue them. You will find they are grounded in scripture and faithful to the Lord's purpose for His Church.

## A MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

As I said, our mission, or the mission of God for Wildwood Church, is the same mission He has for every church. It's the Great Commission, which is in essence a ministry of reconciliation. Listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5...

*“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:18-20*

What I see here is Paul's concept of faithfulness – be reconciled to God and be an ambassador preaching reconciliation to God to other people.

We live in the Quad Cities and within the Quad Cities area we have 4 bridges that connect Illinois to Iowa over the mighty Mississippi River. I think it's safe to say that bridges are important to life here. They connect us from one side to another.

## LIKE A BRIDGE, THE CHURCH IS MEANT TO CONNECT

In in a similar way, the church exists to connect. People have been cut off from God but God made a way for us to be reconciled to Him. Namely, His Son Jesus Christ. Specifically, by belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ we are reconciled to God. Thus, the primary connection Wildwood makes is between people and God.

Wildwood Church exists to connect people to God through the Gospel of Jesus. That's the primary task of our church, and every true church. We cannot do anything that surpasses this in importance or significance. Why? Because the primary need of every person in the Quad Cities and around the world is reconciliation with God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *Romans 1:16* says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

It is the Gospel that has the power to save people from their sin. There is no virtue in seeing people go to hell well entertained with full bellies. To the extent that we are able to meet other needs in order to get the Gospel to them, great! But we have been entrusted with the message that changes people's eternal destinies and we cannot settle for anything less.

We have been entrusted with the message that sinners who are at war with God, and with whom God is at war, can have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." *Romans 5:1*

## PEACE WITH GOD

Our mission is first and foremost to bring men and women into peace with God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have a ministry of reconciliation. How will people know they can be reconciled to God unless we are sent?

Paul asked that very question in Romans 10. "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" *Romans 10:14-15*

In the words of an old buddy, "This ain't automatic." In other words, it doesn't just happen. Granted, God could just make it happen, but in His sovereignty, He chose to use you and me to bring the Good News to sinners and bring sinners into reconciled, peaceful relationship through the Gospel ministry of the church.

## THIS IS ALL OF OUR MISSION

Let me be clear, this is the mission of Wildwood Church, and Wildwood Church is more than the elders and staff. Wildwood Church is you and me. The Lord uses you and me to take the Gospel all over the world. He invites each one of us to join Him in His mission of reconciling the lost world to Himself.

Wildwood Church connects people to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

If this is our primary task, we all ought to know the Gospel. There's a lot you can say about the Gospel. But it can be stated simply.

Our Creator God is holy.

We, His creation, are not.

There is a great chasm between us separating us from our holy God forever. (MS River)

Because He loves us, He sent His own Son, Jesus, to die for our sin. His being raised from the dead is proof that His sacrifice was acceptable to God on our behalf.

By faith in Jesus, we have eternal life and the forgiveness of sins.

Would you like to receive His forgiveness today? Call out to Him in faith and submit to Him as Lord and you will be saved, *"because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Romans 10:9

That's the Gospel. We connect people to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we don't stop there. Wildwood Church connects people to others through discipleship. This is our next mission priority. Our relationships with fellow Christians ought to be relationships that cause us to grow more faithful and more obedient because the church is not primarily a social club; it's a body of believers whose mission is to make disciples who obey Jesus.

## A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

We toss around the term disciple a lot. But I'm not sure everyone quite knows what it means. A "disciple" is one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another. I read a Desiring God article that said, a disciple of Jesus is "one who learns from Jesus in order to live like Jesus."

If you look at the life of Jesus it is obvious what He means when He invites people to follow Him in discipleship. On several occasions scripture records massive crowds of people "following" Jesus. But Jesus knew their hearts, He knew their motives, and He would say things that caused the crowds to disperse. Things like, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* Matthew 16:24 And *"if anyone does not hate his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* Luke 14:26

These are hard things to hear. These people in big crowds didn't want to hear hard things, so they turned around and went home. While Jesus was doing impressive things and giving out free food, they were happy to hang around. But when He started talking about what it would cost them in terms of their lives, they thought twice. They wanted the perks of being close to Jesus, but they didn't want Jesus. I think that's called entitlement, not discipleship.

At Wildwood Church we believe in, and pursue, discipleship. We seek a growing love for Jesus that changes our lives. We grow in our love for the Lord as we grow in our knowledge of Him. The more we come to know Him, the more we love Him. And the more we love Him, the more we obey Him. And the more we obey Him, the more we treasure Him because His ways are always for our good and His glory.

## LOVE IS THE MARK OF A TRUE DISCIPLE

This growing love for Jesus also works its way out in love for other people. This is how we're known to be Jesus' disciples, Jesus said in *John 13:34-35*. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Now, the command to love one another was not new. So, what was new about this command? That we would love others *as He loved us*. How did Jesus love us? “God demonstrated His love for us in this that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” I think of Peter’s words, “love covers a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4:8 I think of “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:7

Love is the mark of a disciple of Jesus. Love for Jesus, which is spelled o-b-e-d-i-e-n-c-e, and love for others, especially when those people are hard to love and when love is hard to do.

What is clear is that being a disciple of Jesus involves a meaningful relationship with Him and with other people and discipleship is how we foster those relationships as a mission priority.

## OUR DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY

Wildwood Church connects people to others through discipleship.

We pursue discipleship here in three key ways: Bible Studies; Connect Groups; Triads

We have several Adult Bible Fellowships that meet every Sunday at 9:00am, along with our Youth Bible Study and Children’s ministry. This is a great way to help people move from large group worship into smaller groups. If you’ve never considered Sunday morning Bible studies, I urge to you make Sunday mornings a two-service occasion each week.

If two services just won’t work, or if you volunteer one service and worship the other, consider a mid-week bible study. We paused our Wednesday evening adult bible studies for this semester, but we have a Tuesday morning women’s study going right now. Lord willing, we’ll be back in action with Wednesday evening adult bible studies after the new year.

Moving beyond Bible Studies, we have Connect Groups who gather in people’s homes throughout the Quad Cities during the week. These meetings are more directed at letting people into our real lives so they can see who we really are and lovingly spur us on to greater faithfulness. This is a time for us to chew on doctrine and wrestle with scripture. It’s a time to ask questions, confess sin (as appropriate), and discern how to apply the truths of scripture to our lives with other people’s help.

Connect Groups are how people in a growing church keep themselves connected to the body. This is how we best care for one another’s needs and hold one another accountable. Trust me, if you want to be just a face in the crowd, our church is large enough you can do that. But at some point, you will regret not being known. Connect Groups help you be known.

Finally, I invite you to pursue a triad. This is a one-on-two discipleship group that takes about 12-18 month’s meeting most weeks for an hour to an hour-and-a-half. This is where we take a deeper dive into theology and doctrine and preparation for ministry.

## MULTIPLICATION, NOT ADDITION

This whole model is a multiplication model. The people we disciple go out and make disciples. We reach people with the Gospel and slowly, over time, disciple them and send them out to reach people with the Gospel to make more disciples. On and on it goes and has gone for 2000 years. This is nothing novel or new; it’s the Jesus model.

I want you to notice that Jesus’ model presupposes connection with other people. He commissioned people to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. The Christian faith is a personal faith, not a private faith. We’re saved individually but we’re saved into a body - the universal body of Christ, made visible by the local church. We need one another to achieve our mission. Which is why our third mission priority is to connect people to the church through partnership.

## YOU ARE PART OF A BODY

We're going to return to this third priority next Sunday, but this is a great place to transition to communion. Communion is expressly about the body. Communion, as the name implies, is about community. It's about the corporate body. It's about us coming together as one body and remembering the body of Christ broken and His blood poured out for us. Communion is not an individual thing; it's corporate.

The Corinthians forgot this; they got selfish. They got fixated on their own priorities and their own needs. They had forsaken the body, and I would argue they had forsaken the mission of God in the world. Paul rebuked them for this and told them to examine their hearts before taking communion.

I invite you to do the same. Our mission statement offers a great self-examination: are you connected to God by belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ? And are you connected to other people as disciples of Christ? Do you recognize you are part of something bigger than yourself, namely the church body? Do you appreciate the body? Do you know you need the body? Do you thank God for His church? Do you thank God for His Son? Do you embrace His mission in the world?

Let's pray.