

## What Has God Done for You Lately? Transforming Congregations Series part 2

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During my sermon for Homecoming Sunday last week, I talked about how excited I am for this new church year because I feel deep in my heart and my spirit that we are on the verge of something new and exciting here at WPC. We have been in a sort of holding pattern for the last few years, as some people have gone and many others have come in....we have been regaining equilibrium and reorienting, if you will...and now we're ready or on the verge of being ready...for God to do something significant in and through us, once again.

To introduce the new church program year, I began a sermon series last week based on Ruth Fletcher's book entitled, *Thrive: Spiritual Habits of Transforming Congregations*. I said I believed WPC is and always has been a Transforming Congregation based on the 12 habits Fletcher outlines.

The first three habits, which we discussed last week laid the foundation. She says, Transforming congregations: pray; they listen—they are discerning of the movement of the Spirit; and they continue to grow spiritually, through a variety of means.

Here are next three:

Aligning: Transforming congregations align their purpose with God's purpose of peace, security, and justice for all.

Engaging: Transforming congregations engage in ministry where there is suffering.

Testifying: Transforming congregations frequently testify to the activity of the Spirit that works in and through their vision, mission, and core values.

Last May, our session, the leadership of our congregation, adopted a mission statement which reflects the current mission of this body of disciples (You can find it on the top of the newsletter insert): ***We are a welcoming and diverse Christian community living our faith in God and affirming the gifts of all of God's people. We are dedicated to serving those in need, demonstrating our faith in action by following the teachings of Jesus Christ.***

On your behalf, the Session is stating that we consciously align ourselves and our mission, as a congregation, with God's purposes.

You may ask, ARE there congregations which would NOT align themselves to God's purposes of peace, security and justice for all. Sure. The Church (big C) has had a sad history of excluding groups of people since it began (women, the LGBTQ community, people who believe differently even within our faith and more). As an institution formed by and run by human beings who are

prone to want and seek power in our world, the willing surrender of power to stand with those who are suffering (the next habit listed) is and always has been countercultural. As followers of the risen Christ, we are called to welcome the stranger in our midst, to visit the prisoner as well as the sick, to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and take care of the orphan and widow (Matthew 25). In fact, at the recent national gathering of Presbyterians, those who represent us, encouraged Presbyterians everywhere to recommit to being a Matthew 25 church...

We need to hear that message now more than ever, as children and parents wait in detention centers around our country; as people in the Carolinas wade through feet of flood waters a week later; as people near to us suffer from mental illness and addiction.

This week I spoke at a Celebration of Recovery luncheon which was held here in town. The theme centered on an invitation from statewide organizations to be a Recovery Friendly Community. Is Wilton a place where we promote healthy clean and sober living, and recovery from substance abuse? Is it talked about at every level and are resources readily available? A young man in his late 20's--WHS grad, who is 4 years clean, spoke about his incredible journey through heroin use and into recovery. He talked about how he suffered, looking good on the outside while in high school while being in severe emotional pain on the inside. That dichotomy led him from pot use in high school to oxycodone use in early college and quickly to heroin. Even after several rehabs, he was homeless for 2 years before thankfully getting clean.

I don't know if he would say that Wilton has been/is recovery friendly to young people.

Next Fall, we're going to host a recovery conference here; It came out of some thinking together with some of our leaders about how we might serve our broader community better. (We currently host 6 AA meetings here at WEPCO through the week.) We'll have speakers and break out groups on different topics for people who are, who know or who love addicts and alcoholics. We want to offer people a chance to connect, learn and grow and be supported. Please let me know if you'd like to help with this.

And know that our Faith in Action dollars are supporting efforts to aid in standing with those who suffer and offer a way to heal. Just this week we heard from a representative from the Wilton Youth Council and NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), which provide support groups locally.

The final habit for this morning is testimony. Transforming congregations are not shy about talking about what God has done and continues to do in their midst.

This month...God has provided....

1. Sanctuary leaks, moisture issues, oil tanks....bequest for 100,000

2. Need for a car for Manal, the Syrian mother of 5 we helped relocate...to a conversation “do you know of anyone who needs a car?”

As your pastor, I am privy to numerous other ways God has and continues to work in your individual life, but those are YOUR stories to tell, and I invite you to tell them. For in so doing, you help others see the work of the Spirit in their lives as well.

Today, we sing to the glory of God...how appropriate that we dedicate our new hymnals this morning—hymnals called “Glory to God!” May it be so! Amen.