

## Meeting Jesus

Luke Bushman, January 7th 2024. Based on part of the OMC Statement of Purpose "The purpose of Osler Mennonite Church is to be a supportive community in which people can meet God through worship and fellowship." Matthew 2:1-12

For the next sermons, we are going to be taking some time to focus on our statement of purpose, by unpacking it in three separate sections. Today our focus is this sentence: The purpose of Osler Mennonite Church is to be a supportive community in which people can meet God through worship and fellowship. Our statement of purpose continues on, but this morning we are only focusing on this part of our statement. I feel like a relative newcomer, so by saying the ways I see us living this out doesn't feel like bragging to me, because the good things here were here long long before I came.

A supportive community.

I have to admit, there was a time in my life where I really got sick of that word community. I went to Columbia Bible College, which has about 400 students. On any given day there are probably about 500 or 600 people at the campus. The word community was used A LOT in this context, and in many ways this was true, as I built some very close friends during my time there. My group of friends used to watch the TV show Community (which is about a community college) every night at 11:00pm. We called it Community and Community. Probably my own fault I got sick of the word community. The real reason I struggled with this word is because it was used because the college was "so small, and everyone knows everyone's name". While to a lot of people in the Fraser Valley, the school probably felt small and tight knit, I did not feel that, since the school had a similar population to Hepburn Saskatchewan. While lots of others were relishing in the small feel of things, I was overwhelmed being in the biggest setting I had ever been in.

Being a supportive community takes a lot more work than just being in a small setting. It requires a level of sacrifice, compromise, empathy and love. I see our community being supportive in a lot of different ways. This church seems committed to providing care for those in crisis. We not only have two pastors on staff, but we also have a deacons committee committed to providing pastoral care. This is not to mention

all of the informal ways we support each other. This is certainly not a church that sits back and leaves all of the work to the pastors. I think this reflects our desire as a group to be a supportive community. Hopefully we can listen to one another and find the areas of our community that need more support. I hope we are a group that tries our best, and also listens to others regarding how we can do better. One of my favourite things is when I ask somebody for their assistance and they say “No I can’t help with that”. While finding volunteers in certain situations can be hard, I would rather people feel safe and listened to, versus feeling pressured to do something they aren’t comfortable with. Listening to one another doesn’t mean we always agree, and it may involve compromises and sacrifices. But being a supportive community is dependent on our ability to listen. If there are ways we can be more supportive, I hope you feel comfortable talking to Patty or myself. We absolutely are not perfect in our attempts to provide support, but it is what we want to do, and it is a priority in this church. I know it is a priority because no one has complained about how short my sermons can be- we seem to know care and connection is more important here than preaching. We will touch on the importance of teaching and learning when we get to the next section of our statement of purpose.

Where people can meet God through worship.

We spend a significant amount of time together worshipping. We have a worship committee that puts together our services and our schedule. They work hard to come up with rhythms and themes that connect us to our creator. I like that singing together, reading scripture, and praying are what take up the bulk of our Sunday mornings. I think our services do not put too much focus on the folks at the front, and involve lots of participation from everyone in the room. This really brings about a togetherness when it comes to worship, and eliminates the idea that only certain people can participate in worship. I always think it is funny when we do things like Friedensfurst or choir singing and there are more people at the front than in the pews singing. That paints a nice picture of how worship here is for everyone. I am not a very musical person, and I certainly cannot sing a tune very well. I have felt very included in worship here because

one of the roles I often do is Worship Leader. I really like that, not because I am vain and love the title of leader, but because it acknowledges that even if you are not a gifted singer or musician, you are still a participant in worship. Worship is a lot more than just singing, which is something I have always heard, but not something I have ever really understood, because it always felt like worship was for other people. If you care about worship, and want to get involved, but maybe lack the confidence to sing up front, or speak in front of people, talk to us- you don't need certain skills to help with worship, just an interest in it.

Where people can meet God through fellowship

I am a people person, and so this is a part of our purpose that gets me really excited. We have weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms that promote fellowship. Every week we have volunteers who put out coffee and snacks in the gathering room so we can sit and visit with one another with a treat and a warm cup of coffee. Food is so important to so many people and cultures when it comes to connection, and it is so ingrained in our lives, I don't even have the words to explain why food promotes connection to one another. Every few months we have a potluck, but we also have other less food centred regular fellowship like Faspa and Conversation (there is still food involved). We have different weekly programming like youth and pickleball that brings people together.

That is a bit of a recap of what we do right now to try and live into our statement of purpose. The question we can always ask is what can we add or do differently to help us better live out this statement of purpose. What words should we maybe change in our statement of purpose? Here are some questions we can ponder as we look to live in the way of Christ as a group:

What do we need to do to better function as a supportive community?

- What support can we give?
- Are there people in need of support that don't currently have it?
- Are we already stretched too thin to do more at this moment?

How does our worship bring people closer to God?

- How does our worship engage with both tradition and with our modern world?
- Is our worship inclusive enough so that a diverse group can be drawn closer to God?
- How do we portray God in our worship?

Is our fellowship enabling people to meet God?

- Is it easy to get plugged in at OMC?
- Do we make people from different walks of life feel welcome?
- How can we create more points of connection for people?

I hope as we go through this sermon series looking at our statement of purpose, we are able to celebrate the ways that we as a church are thriving, and look at the ways we can do better, or just ways we can do things differently. I personally hope we can continue to lean into the roots we have as an inclusive and supportive community to anyone who is interested. When we look at the Epiphany story, we see that from a very young age Jesus was bringing diverse people together to meet God.

The Magi were not drawn to Judaism- that had existed for a long time and they never took part in it. They were not drawn to the radical message of an upside down Kingdom that Jesus preached because... well Jesus wasn't preaching it. They were drawn to the light of the star. Drawn to explore the mystical and the spiritual in this world, and this exploration led them to Jesus. In the story of the Magi, we do not have an ending like with the shepherds- we do not know if they pass on the message of what they have seen. We do not know their thoughts on Jesus. What we do know is that these foreigners are invited to experience the revealing light of Jesus despite not being from a faith tradition aligned with Jesus and his family. Their pagan study of the stars begins their journey and the scriptural background they get in Jerusalem helps them continue their journey. What truly brings them here is their faith and persistence to find meaning. One commenter notes that while the scribes and priests hear but do not act in this story, the magi simply act. This is a theme that carries throughout the book of Matthew. This story is very different from the telling of Jesus' birth in Luke's gospel.

What remains the same however, is that it is the outsider who is invited to the revelation of Jesus. In Luke's gospel the focus is on the shepherd's invitation- an invitation that defied social and financial divides. Here the focus is on the arrival of the magi- who cross the religious lines that were drawn at the time. This traversing of divides is prevalent throughout the life of Jesus, and subsequently, prevalent in our mission as believers today.

As we look at our statement of purpose we celebrate, dream, and revitalise how we live out our faith. It is our job to be representatives of Jesus as a collective. If strangers came to Osler Mennonite Church from a far away land, with a different religion, would they find the light they are searching for? Would they experience a supportive community to help them in times of need? Would they find worship that brought life and joy into their life as they searched for meaning? Would they discover a unique fellowship that brought them closer to God? If you have suggestions or ideas regarding how we can better reveal Christ's light in our world, please talk to someone about it. This is a great church, but we always want to find ways of better representing who we are, and who Jesus is.

Children's Time:

Today is epiphany Sunday. Now epiphany has a meaning, and a connection to an event. Does anyone know what epiphany means, or what story we are focusing on this morning?

Epiphany means a revelation, usually from light. It is about the light revealing something. In the case of our celebration this morning, epiphany is connected to the story of the magi or the wise men, who followed the light of a star, to find Jesus. Jesus was revealed to them through light. They went looking and found something amazing revealed to them.

So today, I have an activity for you. This morning you are going to go looking and find the light! Hidden in this front stage area are three pieces of a flashlight. The battery pack, the main piece, and the back with the on button. You have to find all three pieces, the older kids can help the younger kids. Then you can turn on the flashlight!

Just like how this flashlight you found would be a great comfort in a power outage or when you are camping, when we find Jesus, he is a great comfort, and lights up our world.