

"All for the Glory of God"
Sermon Series on *1st Pres at the Core*
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(Ps. 34:1-8; 1 Cor. 10:31)

Introduction.

Do you remember the old nursery rhyme about Little Jack Horner? It goes like this.

*Little Jack Horner
sat in a corner
eating a Christmas pie.
He stuck in his thumb
and pulled out a plumb
and said, "What a good boy am I!"*

I think many churches are like Little Jack Horner when it comes to developing mission statements and doing ministry. They put all this time and effort and energy into developing vision and passion and activity, but at the end of the day all it's really about is so they can stick in their thumb and pull out a plumb and say, "What a great church are we! Look at us! We're pretty special, don't you think?!"

I remember attending a concert by the popular Christian band Casting Crowns. During a break between songs, the lead singer asked the audience, "Do you belong to a rockin' church?" The crowd went crazy and yelled, "Yeah!" The implication is that everyone wants to be in a great church where things are really happening, the Holy Spirit is moving, you're impacting the world, and lives are being changed. But all too often the motivation for all of this ends up being so that we can puff ourselves up and think that *we're* pretty special. The result is spiritual pride.

The core values of First Presbyterian Church are written in a way to try and prevent us from making this terrible mistake. The final and concluding line of the core values is "*...all for the glory of God!*" We recognize that we, and every other church like us, have a tendency to want to make all of life, and even our church life, all about us, when in reality our lives and our church's ministry should be all about God and His glory.

As we conclude this series of sermons today on the core values of First Pres, we're going to unpack this statement and reflect on its meaning for our church and also for our own individual lives.

I. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

Today is Reformation Sunday. It's a time when we celebrate our Scottish heritage as Presbyterians, hence the bagpipes and the Reformation hymns and songs. Did you know that in England they love the gospel because it's something to talk about. In Ireland they love the gospel because it's something to fight about. In Wales they love the gospel because it's something to sing about. And in Scotland they love the gospel...because it's free!

On Reformation Sunday we think about the theological legacy of our forbearers from Geneva and Scotland, and we reflect on the beliefs and practices which led to the reformation of the church in the 16th century. Out of this turbulent period of time in church history emerged a series of statements, or slogans, that were written in Latin which emphasized the central truths (or we might even say the essential tenets) which the Reformers tried to reclaim for the church at that time.

They were stated in a form in which each statement began with the Latin word *sola*, which means "only" or "alone." The five slogans were: *Sola Scriptura* (*Scripture alone*); *Sola Fide* (*by faith alone*); *Sola Gratia* (*through grace alone*); *Solus Christus* (*in Christ alone*); and *Soli Deo Gloria* (*to the glory of God alone*).

This final statement, *Soli Deo Gloria*, reminds us that glory belongs to God alone, not to you and me or to anyone or anything else. His glory is the central motivation for our lives and for the church's ministry. You see, God isn't a means to an end—*He is* the means; and *He is* the end. As we have read this morning in 1 Corinthians 10:31, the apostle Paul says that the goal of all of life is to give glory to God alone, and he writes: "*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.*" The Westminster Catechism puts it this way in answer to the question, "What is the chief end of humanity?" The answer: "The chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

There is a tendency in each of us to take the credit and want the glory for ourselves. All of us battle the temptation of pride, and the Bible says the antidote to pride is the passionate worship of God. Whenever I humble myself in prayer and point to Christ and say, "To God be the glory!" it's hard for me then to be filled with pride. I take the focus off myself and put it squarely back on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's one of the reasons weekly worship is so important in cultivation a life in Christ.

Revelation 19 is a remarkable passage which combines the strange images of twenty-four elders and the four living creatures with a multitude of people no one can number, all praising God together in heaven. Glory and honor and power are given to God, and together they shout, "Hallelujah!" four different times. The Lord's Prayer concludes with this same kind of affirmation, and it ends with an

emphasis on the glory of God – “*For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.*”

The Bible says that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. On that day a lot of thrones that seemed secure will come tumbling down. People who thought that they were pretty special and that they were in charge are going to end up very surprised. Every president, every king, every CEO, every movie star, every billionaire, every franchise athlete, along with the likes of you and me, will bend the knee and bow down to the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

It reminds me of the lyrics of the *Hallelujah Chorus* where it says, “The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. And He shall reign forever and ever and ever! Amen!”

The follower of Jesus Christ is a person who has declared his/her allegiance to the King and His kingdom, and that person is trying to live their lives in the power of God’s Holy Spirit, with an attitude to give all credit and the glory to the Lord. It’s not about seeking to make a name for ourselves, or trying to draw attention to what we’ve done. Rather, it’s having a desire that all the praise and the glory be given to God.

There is a prayer I sometimes pray on Sunday mornings at the beginning of the day or with those who lead worship. I learned from an older pastor I worked with when I was in my first church right out of seminary. He was a great pastor who was from Ireland, and he often prayed, "Lord, as we lead in worship today, we would not climb on the shoulders of Jesus in order to be seen by people, but let us hide behind the cross of Christ and show Him forth, that others may see Him and be drawn to His love."

Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10 urge us to give the glory to God, for He alone is deserving of our praise. And whatever success you and I may enjoy or whatever recognition may come our way, we should always take it with a grain of salt and try to redirect it to the praise of God, realizing that He is the One who has blessed us with the opportunities we enjoy and successes we achieve. Should the moon ever take credit for how brightly it shines at night? It’s only the reflection of the light of the sun which helps it shine as beautifully as it does.

II. The Danger of a Shadow Mission.

A few years ago, I heard my friend John Ortberg give a talk at the Leadership Summit that really spoke to me in a powerful way. John is the senior pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California, and in that talk he said all of us have a tendency to lose our way in fulfilling God’s mission in our lives. He said if we’re not careful we’re tempted to yield to what he called a “shadow mission.” And he related the story of Esther in the Bible to explain what he meant.

John said that Esther's real mission was to stand in the breach with her husband the king on behalf of the Jews to save her people. But she was tempted to fulfill a lesser mission, a "shadow mission" as John called it, of simply living a life of luxury in the palace as the queen. He suggested that all of us are tempted to yield to a shadow mission. Even Jesus was. Remember? He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness in three different ways to bypass the cross and fail to accomplish His real mission.

Solomon's shadow mission was pleasure. Jonah's was escape. Pilate's was abdicating responsibility. Our shadow mission is closely related to our gifts and our passions, and Ortberg said that it's when we're under stress and pressure, and when we're afraid, that's when we tend to revert to our shadow mission. It can also happen when we're simply being lazy.

Then John asked us, "What's your shadow mission?" It's a great question. He said he knew what his is, and he told a story about how, when he was a boy growing up, he entered a number of speech-making contests. When he was 12-years-old, he won one of them, and the headline in his hometown newspaper read: "Talkative Boy Wins Acclaim." John said his shadow mission is to use his gift for communication to win the approval and affection of people.

John went on to also talk about the shadow mission of his church – Menlo Park Presbyterian. He discovered in the early months after being called there a number of years ago that people on the staff and in leadership joked from time to time about how Menlo Park Pres was "the successful church for successful people." Everyone laughed whenever anyone said it. But after a while John realized that really was their church's shadow mission – the successful church for successful people in Silicon Valley.

A mission is the highest purpose to which God calls us. A shadow mission is an authentic mission that has been derailed, often in imperceptible ways. Part of what makes the shadow mission so tempting is that it's usually closely related to our gifts and passions. It's not 180 degrees off track; it's just 10 degrees off. But that 10 degrees leads us in the direction of hell.

What's your shadow mission? It's a useful exercise to ask yourself that question. What would you say your shadow mission is? And an equally good question to ask is what is the shadow mission of our church? And how is this shadow mission really a reflection of trying to bring glory to ourselves rather than to God?

Sociologist Peter Kreeft has written that pride is the greatest sin of all because it is the living heart of all sins. Every sin says to God, "My will be done." Pride isn't a terrible sin that is only practiced by the worst of people. No. Pride is a terrible sin that is the heart of the spiritual cancer that affects all of humanity.

However, we don't have to live in defeat because of this. Instead, we can admit our essential spiritual defect and call upon the Lord. We can cry out, "Lord, become my righteousness. Take my life in all of its useless and petty and deadly pride, and overcome it. Help me in it; help me with it. Use that very battleground to train and disciple me. Make my fatal flaw of pride the occasion of my growth." And we find that Christ is not only willing to forgive us, but to stand with us and absorb our shame, to cover our sin and hide it from the scrutiny of the Accuser who is Satan himself.¹

Corrie Ten Boom used to tell the story about a proud woodpecker who was tapping away at a dead tree when the sky unexpectedly turned black and the thunder began to roll. Undaunted, he went right on working. Suddenly a bolt of lightning struck the old tree, splintering it into hundreds of little pieces. Startled but unhurt, the prideful bird flew off, screeching to his feathered friends, "Hey, everyone, look what I did! Look what I did!"

This woodpecker reminds me of some people I've known over the years. They are so busy bragging about their achievements and their greatness that they fail to recognize God as the source of all their abilities. They are suffering from spiritual delusions of grandeur. Without the Lord no one, and no church, will ever amount to anything, and in our own strength we cannot accomplish the mission of God.

Conclusion.

Earlier this month Lorie and I had the great privilege of meeting our two newest grandchildren, Campbell Everly and Millie Michelle. They are the first two Barnes girls in four generations! They are blazing a trail! It was a thrill to hold these little one in our arms, and we praise God for the gift of their new lives.

In addition to meeting Campbell and helping take care of her, one of our jobs when we were in Colorado was to help keep our oldest grandson occupied and play with him for much of the (which we discovered is a very exhausting experience!). Lleyton is three-years-old, and he's had a rude awakening with the birth of his little sister. He's no longer the center of attention anymore, and that has been a difficult adjustment for him in some ways.

On several occasions when Lorie and I were playing with Lleyton, he wanted to show off and demonstrate to us how he could do something. He'd say, "Look at me! Look at me!"

It's cute when a three-year-old does that, but it's not so attractive when an adult does. And it's also not very attractive when a church tries to do it. "Look at me! Look at us!"

At First Presbyterian Church, our heart's desire is to make every effort we can to ensure that instead of saying, "Look at us!" we instead say, "Look at Jesus!"

Look at Jesus! We give Him all the praise and honor and glory.” It’s all for the glory of God.

Many years ago I heard Ken Medema in concert. Ken is a classically trained pianist who later became a well-know Christian recording artist. Often in his concerts Ken will ask the audience to call out three random musical notes and three random words, and then he will compose a song right on the spot using the words and notes that have been provided. And usually the songs are deep and profound and amazingly beautiful. They are one-of-a-kind spontaneous compositions which are powerful expressions of praise that are filled with spiritual insight. Ken is a genius, he’s an amazing musician, and he has a remarkable gift.

At the conclusion of the concert where I heard him, Ken did something unusual that night. He got the entire audience involved in singing the last song with him, and then somehow he got us all involved in meeting the people around us while he continued to play. Then, as the crescendo of the voices of the audience rose and as we talked with each other, quietly and gradually he lowered the volume of the music he was playing. And then he walked off the stage unnoticed. There I stood with gratitude in my heart for the beauty and the wonder of this amazing evening, and the only one I could thank was God.

That was how Ken wanted to end his concert. And really, when you come right down to it, that's the way it ought to be for all of us. Any applause we might receive and any credit that may come our way we should redirect to God who is the Giver of all good gifts. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10, “*And whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*” It’s all about Him. That is First Pres at the core. Amen.

¹Peter Kreeft, *For Heaven's Sake: The Rewards of the Virtuous Life*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1986), pages 95-105.