

Fulfill Your Ministry!

Colossians 4: 17

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

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Our verse this morning begins with a call to mindfulness. “And say to Archippus, ‘See to it that you fulfill the ministry you have received in the Lord.’” Paul is saying to this guy, “Look. Pay attention. You have a ministry to do. It came to you from the Lord. So see to it that you remember the work and get it done.” We don’t exactly know what this Archippus was supposed to do. But like a great coach, Paul gave him a single sentence that he could break down to be a mission statement for his whole life. “Be mindful. Set your mind on the work the Lord gave you to do. What you pay attention to is what you end up doing. So focus on the ministry given to you. That way you will fulfill it.”

Paul’s words work for all of us. Everyone who belongs to Christ Jesus has joined his team. And each member of Christ’s team has an assignment to carry out. That way the whole team moves forward in accomplishing Christ’s work in the world. Be mindful that your life is about serving the God who made you and redeemed you. He wants you to participate in his mission to the world. *See to it that you fulfill the ministry you received from the Lord.*

I find this verse both challenging and freeing. It’s a bit daunting because it scares me to think that the Lord has given me tasks that are specifically for me to fulfill. I want to be sure I know what they are. I’m worried I might not be able to do the work. But then I find it so freeing to consider that I’m *only* called to do what the Lord has given me to do. My ministry is simply living the life that’s before me, but doing so as an offering of worship and thanks to the Lord. Be the Lord’s man where you are. Be the Lord’s woman, where you are. Be mindful of the way the Lord Jesus wants you to live, and do whatever you do in his strength and for his glory.

Fulfill your ministry by being the Lord’s arms as you hold babies at the daycare where you work. Be the Lord’s ambassador as you move through the hallways of the retirement community. Be the Lord’s Mom, the Lord’s banker, the Lord’s oncologist, the Lord’s attorney, the Lord’s artist, the Lord’s carpenter, the Lord’s husband, wife, brother, sister or child in the midst of your family. 90% of the ministry you’re called to fulfill is just doing what it’s been given to you to do, but doing so mindfully, with Christ’s values, attitude and passion while you do.

In other words, the mission and ministry of our church is the sum total of the lives of our members living as Christians in this community. Be mindful of your Lord and his priorities as you live the life he gives you. Consecrate your life to him when you rise, and then enter the day living from his strength and living with openness to what he brings you. Pour out yourself in Christ's service through your life in order to fulfill the ministry he has for you.

Now when we live with that kind of mindfulness, we quickly realize that living as Christ's light in a dark world is difficult. As we pour out ourselves in daily life consecrated to Christ, we realize we need to get filled back up. A people mindful of living for Christ doesn't need gimmicks to get them to worship. We're desperate for it. We realize we can't do life in this world on our own. We can't raise children in Christ by ourselves. On our own, we can't process all we face: the distractions, temptations, illness, loss, broken relationships, mean people, betrayals, setbacks, and general chaos that comes to us. And then add the brokenness we see in the world around us. We need companions. We need a community that helps us reset our minds back on Christ Jesus after the battering of the week living for him in our ordinary lives. We need others to help us focus how we work together to bring his light and love to our city. How could we make it as Christ's people in this world without each other?

Consider the miracle that is our church: a pulsing, productive community of Christ in the heart of downtown. Gathering weekly to draw deep nourishment from the Word. Dispersing through daily life to bless our community, sharing the invisible comfort that we have locked arms together to live for Jesus in this city in these times. Praying, loving, serving together: to uphold one another through the joys and trials of real life, to form children and youth in the Word, to partner in ministry to our city and world.

I've been talking with a guy who's been in a social media war with an old friend who turned into a rather angry and militant atheist. We've chatted about how to distinguish between what's a real question and what's just snarkiness that should be ignored. I found I could stay steady and even while helping him respond to the theological questions. But I lost my emotional reserve the day he reported to me how his friend thought churches were worse than useless, and actually harmful to people and communities. I thought of you, and I got pretty mad. Thankfully, I know better—usually—than to pop off on God questions when I'm angry. As I cooled down, I tried to think of a positive way to put the worth of a church to someone who doesn't know what we are. I tried to think about what makes a

church unique in a community. And why no one but Christians relying on the Holy Spirit could ever reproduce the miracle that is a church. So here's the challenge I suggested he share with his old friend:

To understand a bit of what a church is all about, try the following. And, by the way, I'm going to make it easy on you and just give you a part of it. First, gather 750 of your friends and invite them to meet you in the same place at the same time every week to go over your common beliefs and your common goals. Once you get that going, maintain a gathering of 750 people every single week for 150 years. Yes, that's right, you won't be here that whole time, so you'll have to figure out how to replenish your leadership and participants all that time. OK, I know, that's a bit much, so let's just try this experiment for a few years, just a decade. Here's a few things to do while you appeal to your 750 to keep gathering.

Find 50 of your like-minded friends who want to mentor students and encourage teachers at a public elementary school for nine months a year. And be sure to find funding for any special projects your school needs. While you're at it, begin a new school for 100 under privileged students from failing public schools. Attract these students with the energy and power of your philosophy of life. See that it is funded by the community. Send 40 volunteers a month to help. Meanwhile, over a decade, raise the funds and then gather the volunteers to build 5 houses for 5 families in our community—just you guys. Once a month feed lunch to 100 homeless people and assist the community leader who is encouraging them with your philosophy of life. At the same time, have your folks meet 500 clients a month at a community center. Help those clients keep their power on, pay their rent, write resumes, learn job skills, get jobs, balance budgets and keep those jobs.

Of course all of this is secondary to your primary goal. As your 750 gather every week, offer them a story that accounts for the sorrow and struggle in life in a real way while offering hope for reconciliation, forgiveness, growth and change. Teach your 750 to commit to living life together, seeing each other through births, hospitalizations, deaths, teenage crises, midlife job changes, and the challenges of aging. Offer a story that gives each person a deepening sense of purpose. Provide a view of the world that creates a sense of peace even amidst chaotic circumstances. Teach people how to handle the reality of death and grieving. Teach people how to forgive one another and be tolerant of others. Teach people how to be healed from past wounds, how to resolve anger into acceptance. Give people hope that endures. Inspire them to see their whole lives as service to others.

If all that seems easy, and you are keeping your 750 friends active and energized, go ahead and start a preschool for 125 students that teaches essential optimism about life and instills the ideas of justice and fairness. Create a counselling center where hundreds of people can receive first-class therapy that also syncs with your world view. Then create events that will draw 1000 people to your gathering four times a year. And perhaps consider doing this on a campus you maintain which is uniquely beautiful in the community and gives participants a constant sense of both welcome and transcendence. That way you can support the arts by hosting musical concerts, recitals and plays of the finest caliber. Provide peaceful green space in the heart of a city. Do all of this in partnership with another similar community that's of a different race. Maintain peace and unity among your people throughout.

And, of course, I'm cutting it short to spare you. But when you've done this for a few years, and really believe you can sustain it, come back and talk to me about whether or not a functioning church is valuable.

Just thinking this way, I realized, a church is a miracle. Only the Spirit of God could continue to reproduce communities of Christians across the world in every culture throughout 2000 years. Only Christ himself could keep our church being our church in Baton Rouge for these two centuries. And our gracious Lord does so in such a way that every single one of us matter to the whole. Every time we gather to re-create and re-create the church Sunday after Sunday in worship, each person who attends matters. Every ministry matters. Every chair-folder, Sunday school teacher, organizer, volunteer, elder, deacon, staff or pastor. Every single giver. That includes every intentional act of fulfilling your ministry through making gifts of money as well as time and talent. We have been able to do so much because God is fueling us through the gifts we each make. It takes every member and every gift. Together, we fulfill what God has called us to do!

So it's not hard for me, when I'm struck with wonder about what a church really is, to say, "Go ahead and make an estimate of giving for 2019. Your leadership includes able, gifted, financial planners. Telling us your intent makes planning possible. And planning makes the church possible. Of course circumstances may change in your life. We understand that. We don't send black limousines. We're fiscally conservative. We trust God, but we don't test him. We don't do ministry that our people haven't committed to do. So, yes, I'm happy to ask you. Fulfill your ministry. Sooner rather than later, dedicate your Estimate of Giving with joy and faith, thanksgiving and expectation. It matters. It's significant. It makes this engine go.

See to it that you fulfill the ministry which you have received from the Lord.
That's a mission statement for life. It's the reason we love our church. Dear ones,
fulfill your ministry. In your homes, in your work, and in your church. What a deal
that we get to have a part in what Christ is doing!