

Haydenville Congregational Church

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1 Peter 3:13-22

"Tweeting Our Faith"

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer. Amen.

Okay.

I am beginning this sermon with a very small confession.

The title of the sermon, "Tweeting Our Faith," is ever-so-slightly
false advertising.

Truth be known...

I do not tweet.

I have never tweeted.

I would not know what a tweet looks like.

I have could not send a tweet if I had to.

Tweeting is beyond my capability.

HOWEVER, I understand from friends who tweet that tweeting is a way to type
a short message on the internet through your "twitter account" and then send

that message magically to many people at once. The key words are SHORT message and MANY people. Apparently, when tweeting, you type out a brief message, hit "send," and your list of "twitter followers" receive your message on their computers or phones.

And "short" really is the key concept. A tweet cannot be longer than 140 characters. That means 140 key strokes...every letter, comma, period and space is a character. Each tweet is limited to 140 characters.

So why am I talking about tweeting when I don't even tweet?

Well, I know a little about tweeting. I know that vast numbers of people regularly send and receive these short 140 character messages and are enthralled by them. And last Sunday I was so struck by the Statements of Faith written by our five Confirmands and read from this pulpit during our Confirmation Service that I wanted to take a key line or two from those Statements of Faith and send them out into the world.

The idea of tweeting some of our Confirmands remarkable wisdom and inspiration seemed to me to be a new way to evangelize the world, to tell people what we believe and what we stand for. I got it in my head that we should take 140 characters from Will's Statement of Faith, and from Gabe's, Ileana's, Reilly's and Jon's and tweet them out to an enormous network of people to say SEE! Christianity is alive and progressive, exciting and cool, relevant and life-changing, touching and sustaining. SEE, these young people know where it's at!

Listen to a few of the lines lifted from our Confirmands' Statements of Faith that I would like to tweet to the world...

From Reilly: Some...see God in nature as a river, or clouds...but I feel him. I feel his presence...I see God in the community of people that love and support me.

From Will: I believe there is a higher power...that higher power is the fact that all this amazing stuff is here. Humans, knowledge, trees, culture,

Facebook.

From Gabe: I believe that God is inclusive and embraces everyone and everything....I believe in God as a manifestation of peace and justice who is all about understanding.

From Ileana: I have faith in love and in community, and that's enough for me, at least for now.

From Jon: God...gives us hope and courage to go on with our lives. I see God through people who help others for the common good. God hears our prayers.

Brief. Beautiful. Tweetable.

I think boiling our beliefs down to 140 characters is a good theological exercise AND it is consistent with the instruction given to us today in our Scripture reading from the book of 1 Peter. Peter tells the early Christians:

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

Peter is saying to the early Christians: Jesus has touched your life and people will see you are different, people will see the hope in you (I would say the light in you) and they will ask you why you have hope, why you are filled with light. You need to be ready to make your defense (or to explain yourself) to those who ask.

Peter is telling the early Christians: people will detect that you are a Jesus follower, part of the Jesus Movement. They SHOULD be able to detect that you are a Jesus follower. They will see hope in you. So be ready, at a moment's notice, to explain yourself.

Tweeting our faith means getting what we believe in down to just two or three lines so we can, at any moment, explain the hope and joy that people see in us.

As contemporary Jesus followers, I think we should be able to do what Peter instructs. I mean if Starbucks can, we should be able to. The international coffee company boasts that they are on a mission "to inspire and nurture the human spirit-one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time." Not only is that catchy, and not only is it tweetable, but it makes Starbucks sound rather like a church. Change one word and it could be OUR mission statement because so much of our ministry involves food! Listen: "Our church seeks to inspire and nurture the human spirit-one person, one meal, and one neighborhood at a time."

The United States Army has a strong, tweetable mission statement that also sounds like a church: "Be all you can be."

The U.S. Marine Corps has their very inspiring mission statement down to just two words (totally tweetable) and it also sounds like it could be used for a church: "Semper Fidelis" (Latin for "Always Faithful.")

Even Planet Fitness has a short, tweetable mission statement that sounds sort of church-like: "We are a judgment-free zone."

If Starbucks, the Army, the Marines and Planet Fitness can have catchy, inspiring and tweetable statements attached to their mission and work, we need one too.

The short, vivid mission statements I mentioned are very much in keeping with the advice given by Kevin Starr, the executive director of the Mulago Foundation, which matches investment dollars with socially minded businesses. In October 2010, Starr was quoted in the Harvard Business Review as saying this: "Most companies have a mission statement. And most are awash in jargon and marble-mouthed pronouncements. Worse still," Starr says, "these gobbledygook statements are often forgotten by, misremembered, or flatly ignored by frontline employees."

Starr believes that a company's mission statement should be no longer than EIGHT words. That's right, eight words. Notice that the Army, the Marines and Planet Fitness all conform to that guideline.

And so the editors of the journal Homiletics, who stumbled upon Kevin Starr's instruction, decided to try to create a mission statement for Christians that was just eight words. They labored over this task, and here is the result of their work.

Our purpose as Christians, according to the editors of Homiletics:

Love Christ, keep his commandments, receive the Spirit.

Eight words. Rather catchy. Pretty good.

But I think the eight-word goal is too constricting. I prefer the tweetable 140 characters, which suddenly seems long. I think a 140 character tweetable mission statement for us as Christians is a hard task, but a good one to tackle.

Now, before I challenge each one of YOU to write a 140 character Christian

Mission Statement, let's revisit what Peter said in our Scripture reading for today....

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

I want you to remember that Peter is assuming that our being Christians will SHOW in our behaviors, in our attitude, in our demeanor. It makes me think of the old joke, "If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Does your life reflect the fact that you are a Christian? Does the fact that you are a Christian show in how you act, what you say, who you are? Peter assumes that people will ask for an "accounting for the hope that is in you..."-it is a precious line. Peter assumes that our being Jesus followers will seep out, infuse our interactions, influence our behaviors, and people will want to know what makes us tick.

AND Peter is assuming people will ask, people will question us, and we will have to account for our actions, our approach to living-we'll have to explain how we found the hope that lives within us.

In this fast-paced, short-attention-span, world of speed dating and twitter accounts, we need to have what Peter calls "an accounting" ready on the tip of our tongues to explain our faith. We need to be able to tweet our faith-to get it down to maybe 140 characters. We need to have a Christian Mission Statement, maybe just 140 characters, ready to go at a moment's notice to explain why we are the way we are.

So what would you say in a tweetable Christian Mission Statement?

Last Sunday, after our five quite remarkable Confirmands read their Statements of Faith, our Susan Farrell was so inspired by what she heard that she went home and wrote her own Statement of Faith. She e-mailed it to me and Susan Farrell's quite spontaneously written Statement of Faith is very beautiful. It is called "For Now." I have lifted one line from Susan's Statement of Faith, it is the length of a tweet... listen: In the midst of so much chaos and uncertainty, God is still present. When I see grace in humanity, I find peace and uplift.

One hundred and twenty-four characters stolen from the middle of Susan Farrell's Statement of Faith-touching words, raw, honest, moving and tweet-able.

Someone else, very dear to my heart, once wrote her own Statement of Faith.

It was in January 1995, just after her 72nd birthday, that my mother, Gloria Ayvazian, sat down and wrote her own Statement of Faith. It is a short, deeply moving, tender and poignant piece she called "Gloria's Creed."

I have lifted the last line as a stirring and tweetable example of how we can convey the foundation of our faith in just a few words.

Listen, this is from Gloria's Creed:

I believe that by activating the Bible verbs go, do, teach, pray, give, I shall most surely define and inspire my sacred journey through this life.

Perfect. Lovely. Tweetable.

Today I challenge each one of you to take Peter's words from our Scripture reading to heart...

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

In this fast-paced world with drive-through meals and twitter feeds, we need to be able to convey our faith in a few well chosen words. And so I challenge you to write your own Christian Mission Statement in tweetable form and memorize those words...remember it is only 140 characters. You will have to think hard to do this. You will have to discern the essence of your faith and convey it in supremely economical writing. May God bless your good effort.

I will close now with my own Christian Mission Statement in tweet-able form...it is, my brothers and sisters, still a work in progress....but maybe that's okay.

Toby says he is going to tweet it out into the world...

And Toby, it is 137 characters so I know it will fit.

Here we go:

I believe in God's promised Shalom. I believe each of us is called to help make it happen. I believe the church prepares us to do that.

Amen.