

Title: "OIC Identity, Part 2 – Our Statement of Purpose"

Key verse: Acts 2:41-42 (NASB95) – "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup>They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Good morning, everyone. It's good to see you all again. Last month, I started a series of sermons on the identity of Osaka International Church as an interdenominational, evangelical, Protestant church. In that first sermon, I explained the meaning of each of these three adjectives: what it means to be Protestant, to be evangelical, as well as being interdenominational. Although we come from different denominations, we adhere to the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Protestant and evangelical Christianity. This is what we have in common, this Protestant and evangelical foundation. But because we come from different denominations, there may be some differences among us in certain areas of theological perspective and Christian practices – nevertheless, we seek to be charitable to one another and to seek to journey together in Christian discipleship, fellowship, service, and evangelism – the essentials of Christian living. Discipleship, fellowship, service, and evangelism.

The theme verse of this series of sermons comes from Acts chapter 2, where we read about the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down on a group of more than a hundred Christian disciples in a dramatic way and the Apostle Peter preached his famous Pentecost sermon and many people in Jerusalem accepted the gospel. Let's read Acts 2:41-42 (NASB95) – "So then, those who had received his [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

The lifestyle of these early Christians first of all involved devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching – it is so important to have a solid doctrinal foundation, something you have heard from me before and which I tried to emphasize in my message last month. However, doctrine is not the only important thing in Christianity. We are tasked with spreading the gospel – evangelism. The main aim that Jesus gave His church is to make disciples – to make faithful followers of Jesus Christ. There is a verse that I often remind myself of after I teach a Bible study or preach a sermon.

It is 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:5 (NASB) – "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." The goal of learning from the Bible is not an increase in your Bible knowledge. The goal is a transformed life, where we turn away from our former pursuit of worthless and sinful pleasures and instead seek to live a life of love for God and love for people -- love from a pure heart and a clean conscience and a sincere, well-grounded faith. We have to let the Bible completely fill our minds and hearts so that we live by its standards and live lives that honor God and which bless the people around us.

It's not only the Bible that is supposed to fill our minds and hearts. Also crucial is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our churches. Last week, we had a guest speaker and he gave us a fine message on "The Spirit-filled Church." I was really touched when I heard him say this: "The Spirit fills us for mission. Mission without power is fruitless, and tiring! We need him to fill us." We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit as we engage in all of the activities and ministries I am going to describe in today's message. The Holy Spirit empowers Christians for ministry, and we must rely on Him in order to have an effective ministry.

Let's return to Acts 2:41-42. In addition to learning the apostles' teaching, this verse highlights the importance of three other things: fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer – important features of church life. We must first be sure to stand on a firm doctrinal foundation and then next, we get down to the business of living the Christian life, both individually and corporately. Living the Christian life, both individually *and* corporately! Last month, I focused on our doctrinal foundation. Today's message focuses on our corporate life together as a Christian community – a church.

There are several other important features of church life mentioned in other places in the New Testament. I will show you those verses a little later, but first I would like to show you a place that brings many of these ideas together into one statement. This is in our OIC church constitution.

In Article 2 of the constitution, you can read a statement describing the “Purpose” of Osaka International Church. Let me read that statement to you:

The purpose of this church shall be to worship God, to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to celebrate the Lord's Supper and baptism. We shall endeavor to bring all people into the saving knowledge of our Lord, to bind together followers of Jesus Christ for the purpose of sharing in the worship of God and to make Jesus Christ better known, better loved, and better served in all the relationships of life.

I told you last month that I composed this series of sermons as my Final Project in my last course in seminary. As I discussed with my seminary professor the ideas I had for my final project, when I showed him this statement, he said something like this: “Wow. This is really well stated. I don't think I could do anything to improve on this statement. This is a fine statement of purpose for any church to have.”

The various activities mentioned in our statement of Purpose will be the main focus of today's message – these are some of the most important features of church life. Let's look at each of these activities in more detail.

### Part 1: To worship God

Psalm 113:1–2 (NASB95) – “Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord, Praise the name of the Lord. <sup>2</sup> Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forever.”

Psalm 148:1–5 (NASB95) – “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! <sup>2</sup> Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! <sup>3</sup> Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light! <sup>4</sup> Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens! <sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created.”

1st Peter 2:9 (NIV) – “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

What is worship? This English word “worship” comes from the words “worth” and “worthy.” God is worthy of our attention and our adoration. When we worship, we declare an acknowledgement of God's worth and worthiness.

In one of my textbooks, the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, I read this description of worship: “Worship is the reverential response of creation to the all-encompassing magnificence of God (Isaiah 6:1–6; Exodus 15:11; Psalm 148:1–14).” Psalm 148 was one of the psalms I just quoted

a moment ago, and you saw there how not only the angels sing praise to God, but even the sun, moon, and stars are called upon to do so (I suppose that means that they praise God metaphorically – they don't actually have mouths that sing, but sometimes when I look up into the night sky, I marvel at the magnificence of the mind of the Creator, so I know that the heavens are bearing witness to God).

Let me continue reading in the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*:

In the Old Testament, worship encompassed a variety of activities. Bringing forward an offering to God was an act of worship (in Hebrew: *qārab*). Bowing down in the presence of God was an outward display of an inner attitude of reverence before the Creator (*hāwā*). ... The verb *hālal* could be used to designate the act of celebrating God. The word “hallelujah” is derived from the Hebrew phrase *halēlū-yāh*, meaning “praise Yahweh.” This praise could involve *zāmar*, “singing.” Worship could also be described as “servicing” (*‘abad*) God. The ritual life of devotion was emblematic of a whole life given over to God.

[Esau McCaulley, “Worship,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).]

Note the activities mentioned that are characteristic of worship. Bringing an offering. Bowing down. Celebrating. Praising, which might include singing. And servicing. And I would like to read the final sentence of this description one more time: “*The ritual life of devotion was emblematic of a whole life given over to God.*” Our whole lives are to be given to God. Sunday mornings are a special time to gather together to worship God, but Christianity is not just a Sunday thing – the Christian life is a whole lifestyle and *all of our life should be devoted to God*.

This reminds me of a key New Testament verse mentioning worship. Romans 12:1–2 (NASB95) – “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” As Christians, our bodies – our whole selves – are to be a living and a holy sacrifice to God. And that goes for our minds as well: we should be renewing our minds so that they are transformed, ridding ourselves of worldly thinking and conforming our minds to godly thinking.

Let us move on to the next part of today’s message ...

Part 2: To teach and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am reminded of the Great Commission, the primary task that Jesus Christ gave to His followers in Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB95): “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Go.

Make disciples.

Baptize them.

And teach them to obey all the commandments that Christ has given us.

The primary task that the Christian church has is to go to all nations and to teach and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to form disciples.

You have heard me say before that here in this passage, Matthew gives us the primary activities of the gospel endeavor, whereas Luke gives us the primary content of the gospel message in Luke

chapter 24. Here are Jesus' words to His disciples in Luke 24:46–48 (NASB95) – “And He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things’.” The essential commission from our Lord is this: that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations, along with the message that Christ suffered and died for our sins to gain that forgiveness, and that He was raised from the dead to prove His power over sin and death.

The Apostle Paul also gives us the essential contents of the gospel message. 1st Corinthians 15:3–4 (NASB95) – “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,<sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

As you read through the book of Acts, you see the apostles preaching the message in various places, indoors and outdoors, in homes and in synagogues and in the marketplace. The Apostle Paul, during his missionary journeys, whenever he came to a new city, he would usually seek out the local synagogue on the Sabbath, where he was given the opportunity to teach from the Old Testament Scriptures and show how the prophecies of the coming Messiah had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Throughout church history, the worship service on Sunday mornings has featured a reading of the Scriptures, followed by a sermon by one of the teachers of the church. A teaching element has always been a feature of Christian meetings, whether in worship services or in Bible studies. Christianity has been called a “religion of the ear,” because of the great emphasis we place on the proclamation of the Christian message.

So, that's the second aspect of our church's statement of Purpose: to teach and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's move on now to the next part of our message ...

Part 3: To celebrate the Lord's Supper and baptism.

These are the two crucially important ceremonies of the Christian church and they mark out the church as a distinct group of people. Baptism is the initiation of individuals into the church, and is a ceremony often described as symbolizing our new birth: from our former manner of life to our new manner of life as a follower of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper, also called Communion, is a celebration and a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

These two ceremonies of the Christian church are very important and for that reason, I am going to devote one message to explain in more detail the symbolism behind them. I will give that message to you next month in the third sermon of my current series.

I have now come to the halfway point of today's message. To review, let me quote again our statement of Purpose to show you what features we have covered so far and what is yet to come:

The purpose of this church shall be (1) to worship God, (2) to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, (3) to celebrate the Lord's Supper and baptism. (4) We shall endeavor to bring all people into the saving knowledge of our Lord, (5) to bind together followers of Jesus Christ for the purpose of sharing in the worship of God and (6) to make Jesus Christ better known, better loved, and better served in all the relationships of life.

Next ... Part 4 of today's message:

To endeavor to bring all people into the saving knowledge of our Lord.

A few minutes ago, I read for you the Great Commission in Matthew 28 – we are to go and make disciples of all nations. Christians are to bring this gospel message to all peoples. Around the world and to our neighborhoods and friends and family.

We speak of a “saving knowledge” of our Lord Jesus Christ. People need to be made aware of the gospel message, to know it. But beyond that, it is supposed to be a knowledge that is a “saving knowledge.” It’s not enough to just know the message – people who are saved are those who have embraced the gospel message and who act on it and put their faith in Christ.

Acts 16:30-31a (NIV) – “He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’  
<sup>31a</sup> They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...’.”

Romans 10:9-10 (NIV) – “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”  
This is the way of salvation: to believe and to confess the gospel message.

A saving knowledge of our Lord. Knowledge is more than just knowing something. You can know something intellectually, but if you don’t really act on the knowledge, are you really believing it? In my younger days, I heard people at church talk about what they called “The 18-inch miss.” That is, that you could miss out on eternal life by just 18 inches, about 40 centimeters – that’s the distance from your brain to your heart. Do you just believe the Christian message intellectually but you don’t really embrace it with your heart? If you really, truly embrace the gospel with your heart, then that knowledge should permeate your whole being and you would be desirous of actively living out the expectations and commands of the Christian life.

John 3:36 (ESV) – “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” Obeying Jesus Christ is part of true saving faith. If somebody has no desire to obey the commands of Christ, I hardly think that person is truly a believer. I’m not talking about perfect obedience – no one lives perfectly in this life. But a true believer is one who desires to follow his Lord and conform to His teachings.

The Epistle of James is my favorite book of the New Testament. In that letter, James gives us many practical pieces of instruction for living out our Christian life. Let’s read James 1:21-25 (NASB95) – “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

James exhorts us to throw off anything that remains of our sinful habits and then to “receive in humility the word [of God]” implanted in our hearts. And then to not only hear God’s Word but to act on it, to put it into practice, to abide by it. Don’t forget what you hear and read from God’s Word, but be sure to put it into practice and thus be blessed in your Christian life.

There is a lot more I could say on that topic, but it is time to move on to the next part of today’s message ...

Part 5: To bind together followers of Jesus Christ for fellowship and worship.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV) – “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ...”

God wants to see us equipped for works of service and also to aim for unity in our faith and knowledge of the Son of God, seeking to be mature.

Verses 15-16 – “Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Love is an extremely important feature in all of church life – we speak the truth in love while on the road to maturity. We are each supposed to grow in every area of our life, spiritually and socially, and we are to build up one another, each of us playing our part in the Body of Christ, the church.

I love Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV) – “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Don’t neglect going to church. Stir up one another towards love and towards good deeds. And encourage one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NASB95) – “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”

Do you remember last spring when I passed out a questionnaire to people in our congregation? It was a part of the homework I had to do for one of my seminary courses. The questionnaire was seeking to get your perspectives on many aspects of church life at OIC – things that we were doing well and things that we were not doing so well at. One of the interesting things I learned was that many of you like the expression of love that you see here among the people at OIC and that we do a good job of welcoming people. But, in contrast to that, I also found that several of you said that welcoming newcomers was something we were doing a poor job at. That seems contradictory: many of you said we were doing a good job at welcoming and others of you said that we were not. When I discussed this with my professor, he said something interesting – he said, “Well, whether people thought OIC does a good job at welcoming people or a poor job at it, this shows that your church highly values being a welcoming place.”

Well, let me now move on to the next part of today’s message ...

Part 6: To make Jesus Christ better known, better loved, and better served in all the relationships of life.

There is a lot I could say on this topic. I remember fondly the foundation I received in my Christian life in the Sunday School program at the Lutheran church that my mother brought us to when I was a child. I also remember the Bible stories I learned at the church I attended in my teenage years. But when I went to college, I was introduced to a different type of church: that was the church pastored by John MacArthur. He went verse by verse through whole books of the Bible and I heard things that I hadn’t heard before. In my childhood, I heard a lot about Christian morality in general and about some of the great stories of the Bible. But when MacArthur went through the book of Ephesians, I learned a lot of detailed admonitions about relationships – how husbands and wives should relate to each other, how church members should relate to each other. There is much in the Bible that gives us instructions on these things as well.

I can't share all those verses with you, but let me share a few. Colossians 3:13-14 (NASB95) – “Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” Love and forgiveness, the two most crucial virtues that should guide our relationships with our Christian brothers and sisters

Let me share another key verse with you. In Matthew 7:12 (NASB), Jesus says this: “Therefore whatever you want others to do for you, do so for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” This term “the Law and the Prophets” refers to the Old Testament scriptures. You fulfill the basic commands of the Old Testament Bible when you simply do for other people what you would like others to do for you. Many of us learned Matthew 7:12 in the King James Version: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” We call this the “Golden Rule,” because by following it consistently, our relationships can be harmonious.

Let me conclude today's message with one last passage of Scripture – it's the latter portion of 2nd Corinthians 5. Verses 18-19 (NKJV) describe an important aspect of our life as Christians – “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” We read here that God has reconciled us to Himself through the sacrifice of Christ ... and that now we are entrusted with this “ministry of reconciliation.” We have a message for the world: that anyone can be reconciled to God as we ourselves have been.

Verse 20 tells us more – “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.” We Christians are now ambassadors for Christ – we are His representatives to people here on earth, with an important message. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Those of you who have accepted Christ and been reconciled to God are now charged with bringing this message of reconciliation to all those around you – to your friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors. And to those of you here today who have not yet accepted Christ, we plead with you: be reconciled to God, turn away from sinful activities and attitudes, and put your faith in Jesus Christ. After the service today, you can talk to the pastor or talk to me or talk to those persons who are at the “Lift” sign in the back and we can show you the way to be reconciled to our Creator.

This is the function of the church: to form a people for God, who are reconciled to God, who gather together to worship Him and to be in fellowship with our fellow believers, to listen to God's Word and be transformed by it, and to be ambassadors for Christ. Let us go forth from this place today with a renewed focus on this ministry of reconciliation that we have been given and call others to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.