

Sunday Column: A Heartbeat of Girdwood, Week 5 – Mission, Place, and Stewardship

Faith Behind Our Vision (Theological Themes)

- *Participating in God's work in the world – Mission and the mission of God (Missio Dei)*
- *Following Christ through our life with our neighbors – Discipleship*
- *Using our property, resources, and gifts with care – Christian stewardship*
- *Recognizing God's grace beyond our expectations – Prevenient grace*
- *Loving people while honoring their differences – Christian hospitality and love of neighbor*

"Our vision is to be a heartbeat of Girdwood connected in love and committed to Christ, with faith that makes room for grace and honors differences."

The final sentence of our vision names the place where we are called to live our faith: Girdwood. Our neighbors have particular needs, histories, and hopes. Some have lived here for decades. Others come for seasonal work, a vacation, or a visit with friends. Our calling takes shape as we pay attention to the people who share this place with us.

In July, I reflected on this calling in a column called "Faithfulness Has an Address." A heartbeat is both physical and spiritual: our presence in Girdwood's daily life and our life in Christ through worship, prayer, and formation. The relationships we share with our neighbors enter our prayers, and our worship shapes how we return to those relationships.

The small word "a" deserves attention as we revisit this vision. We hope to be *a* heartbeat of Girdwood. This community's life is sustained by many people: those responding to emergencies, preparing meals, caring for children, running local businesses, and quietly checking on neighbors. Our church participates in that shared care. We have a particular contribution to make, and we depend on gifts and work beyond our congregation.

For me, "a" expresses both humility and responsibility. It leaves room to recognize the good our neighbors do, including those who do not share our faith. It also asks us to take our own calling seriously. We have relationships to nurture, resources to share, and a Christian faith to practice openly. Our size does not make those responsibilities insignificant. People can come to depend on the steady presence of a small congregation that knows them and responds with care.

Christian theology speaks of the *mission of God*, sometimes called *Missio Dei*. Mission begins with God's love and work in the world, and the church is invited to participate. When the risen Jesus sends his disciples, he connects their sending with his own: as the Father has sent him, he sends them (John 20:21). Our commitment to Christ draws us into Girdwood's life with something to offer and a willingness to receive.

That calling takes practical form during the Slush Cup, Forest Fair, and other local events, including events at the neighboring brewing company. Our parking fundraisers depend on volunteers who coordinate the work, direct vehicles, and welcome people. We charge for parking because maintaining our building and sustaining ministry involve real expenses. The work also brings us into contact with

people who might otherwise pass by without knowing much about Girdwood Chapel. Some discover that there is a church here; some come through our doors. Even a brief exchange gives us an opportunity to treat someone with care.

I understand this as part of *stewardship*: attending to how the resources we hold serve our calling. First Peter encourages believers to use their gifts to serve others as stewards of God's grace (1 Peter 4:10). That invitation helps us consider our property alongside our time and abilities. How do we communicate clearly, care for the space, and work respectfully with neighboring businesses? Love takes practical expression in these decisions about money, responsibility, and welcome.

Our relationships also take us beyond our property. At Christmas, the resort provides space for the children's pageant, bringing community members together with visitors and resort guests. Since 2025, a short message has accompanied the pageant, sharing the Christmas story in language children can understand.

The children help tell a story at the heart of our faith: God coming among us in Jesus Christ. Luke describes Jesus' birth as good news of great joy for all the people (Luke 2:10-11). Those gathered may have very different relationships with that story. Some know it well. Others hear it mainly at Christmas, and some may come because a child they love is participating.

"Committed to Christ" gives us a reason to share that story with care. "Honors differences" shapes how we receive the people who come. We can speak clearly about our faith while respecting their freedom to respond in their own way. This is part of *discipleship*: learning to follow Jesus in how we speak, welcome, and relate to others. Our Christian identity gives direction to our participation in community life.

"Faith that makes room for grace" also leaves us open to what God may teach us through these encounters. As we explored in our first reflection, prevenient grace reminds us that God is at work before we recognize it. We carry that understanding into our partnerships, ready to learn from a neighbor's generosity or reconsider an assumption.

Grace also shapes what happens when cooperation becomes difficult. Being "connected in love" involves listening when someone raises a concern, acknowledging misunderstandings, and seeking to repair relationships. Honoring differences takes patience when another person sees a situation differently. Our commitment to Christ calls us to keep treating that person with dignity.

I hope our neighbors come to know us as people who keep our promises and are willing to listen. If someone brings us a concern, I hope they find that we take it seriously. If they offer their help, I hope they know it is appreciated. Through this steady, ordinary faithfulness, being a *heartbeat of Girdwood* becomes something our neighbors can experience for themselves.