

## Eternal Word/Changing Worlds

### I. Introduction:

- A. Eternal Word: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, forever
  - 1. God's Word is eternal, changeless
  - 2. God's mission to reconcile all creation to Himself continues unabated
- B. Changing Worlds
  - 1. Ministry contexts change over time and across cultures.
  - 2. To proclaim God's Eternal Word faithfully we must understand the ministry context into which we are sent.
  - 3. Three Missionary arenas
    - a) Pre-Churched (Mission field)
      - (1) The Gospel has not yet been proclaimed in this context
      - (2) The church has not yet been born among these people
    - b) Churched (Christendom)
      - (1) The Gospel has made a significant impact in this context
      - (2) The church holds a key position in the community
    - c) Post-Churched (Post-Christendom)
      - (1) The Gospel's impact is waning
      - (2) The church is being marginalized in the community

### II. Christendom: The World We Knew

- A. Christendom dominated the Western world for nearly 1700 years
  - 1. Lutheran history and ministry is rooted in Christendom. We do not know any other world.
  - 2. Christendom gave the church a sense of confidence, or being "IN CHARGE" of its ministry context
- B. The world of Christendom
  - 1. Church had great credibility in the community
  - 2. Central to the shared story of the culture
  - 3. Knows (shapes) language and culture (values)
  - 4. Socially and culturally in charge
- C. Lutheran's place and role in Christendom
  - 1. 500 years of Confessional Focus
  - 2. Defenders of the true faith in the midst of religious error
  - 3. Sense of permanence
  - 4. Sense of theological and cultural objectivity
- D. Impact on mission outreach to non-Christians
  - 1. The Lord blessed the church with His saving word
    - a) God gathers the church around His Word and Sacraments.
    - b) God is present in His Word and Sacraments.

2. At the same time, the Lord enabled the church to maintain cultural and religious significance in the general community
  - a) Non-Christians desire to connect with the church in some way. They see the church as important and valuable.
  - b) The unsaved world receives God's Word by coming to the church

E. Impact on discipling our own children

1. We disciple our own young people to take their place in a more or less Christian based society, and
2. We prepare "church workers" to take up specific vocations within the church, be it pastor, teacher, DCE, etc.
  - a) Church worker programs at our universities: Trained by the church to minister inside the church and receive our livelihood from the church
  - b) Consider church worker programs: Trained by the church to minister in the world and receive our livelihood from the world.

F. Impact on Gospel proclamation

1. We center Gospel proclamation in the Pastoral Office organizing ministry around it.
2. The Pastoral Office becomes the hermeneutical lens for interpreting Scripture.
3. We read "Great Commission" passages from the perspective of the Pastoral Office.
4. We organize "Gospel ministry" from the perspective of ministry in and to the church.

G. Impact on our assumptions about non-Christians

1. We assume non-Christians think, behave like Christians, and share similar values.
  - a) Non-Christians do not think and behave like us or share our values because they have rejected Christianity. That makes them our adversary.
  - b) Consider: Non-Christians don't think and behave like us or share our values because they don't know them. They've had no Christian influence in their lives.
2. Big question: ***How Christian do you have to be in order to meet Jesus?***

III. Missionary Age has Re-dawned in the West

A. A cultural tsunami has wiped out the Christendom bridge connecting the world to the church.

1. Christendom has collapsed for Northern European based churches
  - a) Roman Catholicism remains strong among Latino cultures
  - b) The collapse of Christendom greatly impacts a 98% anglo LCMS
2. Gone is the "West reaches the Rest" mission paradigm
  - a) The fruit of past missionary labors has resulted in sister churches around the world. Praise our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
  - b) As previous mission fields become church and the source for missionary service around the world,
  - c) The USA is shifting from a church society to a post-church or post-Christendom society. It's the third largest mission field in the world (following China and India).

## B. Two Observations

1. While our ministry contexts have shifted toward a missionary reality our methods of proclaiming the Gospel in Word and Sacrament have remained thoroughly entrenched in the reality of Christendom.
  - a) Operating assumption that the bridge from society to the church is intact.
  - b) Maintain a pastor centered model of Gospel proclamation
    - (1) Word and Sacrament/Altar and Pulpit
    - (2) Divine Service (This is where people meet Jesus)
2. The mission field challenges that we face puts us off balance which tends to accentuate the need and desire for the increase of an ecclesiastical order that flourished in the days of Christendom.
  - a) Grief over a lost past
  - b) Fear over an unknown future
  - c) Unable to navigate non-Christian waters while remaining faithful to the Gospel.

## C. When the Bridge is gone, it's time to recalculate

1. GPS: Recalculating
  - a) A GPS offers a sense of relief.
  - b) While we do not know the way, we are confident that the GPS does and will safely guide us to our destination.
    - (1) We are in unfamiliar territory, we cannot see down the road very far
    - (2) Our GPS, however, with its satellite vantage point sees for miles
2. Jesus began His Missionary Ministry with the words, "Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand." Matthew 4.
  - a) It's helpful to hear Jesus' call to Repentance as a call to "Recalculate":  
"Recalculating, the Kingdom of God is at hand."
    - (1) We associate the word "Repent" primarily with personal sin and the need to turn away from it with contrite heart and ask God for forgiveness. Such association is appropriate.
    - (2) A concern with this association, however, is that it often leaves us hopeless and helpless. We feel the finger of the Law pointing at us and saying, "Fix this mess!"
    - (3) It's like being lost somewhere and my GPS announcing:
      - (a) So you got us lost again, or
      - (b) If you had listened to me in the first place we would not be lost, or
      - (c) Find your way back to the main highway and I will help you from there.
    - (4) My GPS never says anything like that. It says quietly and confidently, "Recalculating." Within that single word lies the following
      - (a) We covenanted together on an original course with a clear destination.
      - (b) Presently, we are not on that original course.
      - (c) But we're not lost. We can get to our destination from where we are.
      - (d) I am setting the new course for us.
      - (e) Follow me.

- (5) Our Lord in His Spirit is a wonderful GPS.
  - (a) Like a GPS He views our lives from a vantage point far outside our limited world.
  - (b) He set the coordinates of our journey with Him at our baptism.
  - (c) He is able and willing to complete that journey with us.
  - (d) We simply follow Him
- b) Jesus admonition to “recalculate” is more than a call to individuals to change course with Him, but a call to His entire church on earth to change course with Him. He is calling His church to follow Him once again into the world that His Father sent Him to save.
- c) Recalculating is a kind and gracious word from Christ.
  - (1) You feel very lost in this unknown and confusing terrain.
  - (2) “Don’t worry, I know where we are and where we need to go.”
  - (3) “I’m changing our course to bring in line with my Father.”
  - (4) “I know the way; follow me.”

#### IV. We begin recalculating by using the correct map

- A. Recognize the Church/Mission Contexts in which we communicate the Gospel: Pre-Churched (Mission Field), Christendom, Post-Christendom (Mission Field)
- B. These contexts operate like “street maps” in our community
  - 1. If we are not operating with the correct map we will easily get lost and frustrated
  - 2. We need to use the correct map, that is, know the context in which we are communicating
- C. Each ministry/mission context has its own set of cultural insiders and outsiders
  - 1. Insiders PROTECT the Boundaries of their Culture
    - a) Values
    - b) Beliefs
    - c) Social Systems
  - 2. Outsiders BRIDGE those Boundaries.
- D. Cultural insiders determine several factors that impact our ministry
  - 1. *Who* speaks with credibility regarding spiritual issues
  - 2. *When* conversations about spiritual things takes place
  - 3. *Where* conversations about spiritual things takes place
  - 4. *What* is the starting place for these conversations
- E. The important mission/ministry question is:
  - 1. Which are we?
    - a) CULTURAL INSIDERS
    - b) CULTURAL OUTSIDERS
  - 2. Depends on the context.

## V. Three Mission/Ministry Contexts

- A. Pre-Churched: Church has no shared history with the unchurched (pre-Christian) society.
  - 1. Non-Christians are cultural insiders. They will work to PROTECT the Boundaries of their cultural system.
  - 2. Missionaries must begin as cultural outsiders (having no personal credibility)
    - a) They work to bridge the boundaries of non-Christian belief systems
    - b) They recognize that the church is “not in charge” in this context. The non-Christian’s worldview is the reigning paradigm or worldview of reality
  - 3. The WHO, WHERE/WHEN, WHAT questions are determined by the nonChristian not the missionary
- B. Churched: The church (as social institution) is an essential part of the community.
  - 1. Christians are cultural insiders.
  - 2. Christians work to PROTECT the Boundaries of the their cultural/belief system
  - 3. The WHO, WHERE/WHEN, WHAT questions are determined by the church
- C. Post-Churched: *The community around the church is increasingly unchurched, more and more reflecting the “pre-churched” context of ministry. At the same time, the church continues to operate with the assumptions of a “churched” society or context.*
  - 1. No cultural outsiders
    - a) Non-Christians see themselves as cultural *insiders*
    - b) Christians see themselves as cultural *insiders*
  - 2. Both groups work to PROTECT the Boundaries of their cultural systems.
  - 3. The reigning worldview is up for grabs.

## VI. Church Responses to Post-Christendom

- A. Man centered responses
  - 1. Compromise
  - 2. Prosperity Gospel
  - 3. Shallow Discipleship
- B. Response of Confessing Lutherans
  - 1. Hold fast our Confession of Christ
    - a) Confess Jesus to the world
    - b) Keep the Christian faith pure
  - 2. Temptation: Circle the Wagons
- C. Circling the Wagons
  - 1. Adopt a siege mentality (non-Christians are enemies)
  - 2. Fortify the boundaries (strict uniformity)
  - 3. Limit ministry to where the church is in charge
  - 4. Consolidate theological authority in fewer people: Ordained pastors, bishops, popes
- D. The Lutheran Confessions and God’s Mission
  - 1. Three primary functions of our Confessions
    - a) Evangelical witness to the world (Augsburg, Apology, Smalcald Articles)

- b) Teaching instruments for our members (Small and Large Catechisms)
  - c) Test of orthodoxy for members, especially our teachers (Formula of Concord)
2. John Kromminga: *The element of witness to the world usually seems to enjoy its greatest prominence when a confession is first written and adopted. This is because a confession is ordinarily produced in response to some crisis on which the church must take a stand. But as time goes by and the particular crisis fades into the past, the accent tends to fall more and more on the second and third functions of a confession.*
  3. The Ageless Danger: *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."*
    - a) Our "first love" reflects God's "first love"
      - (1) God's first love is missional: *"God so loved the world . . ."*
      - (2) His love precedes all others
      - (3) His love exceeds all others
    - b) Our first love must embrace the world
  4. Lutheran Doctrine is missional at heart.
    - a) Justification by Grace Through Faith Alone
      - (1) God for all people: *Who desires all people saved and come to the knowledge of the truth* (I Timothy 2)
      - (2) God alone saves: *"By grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves . . ."* (Ephesians 2)
      - (3) Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the preaching of Christ. (Romans 10)
    - b) Non-Christians cannot come to the Gospel on their own; God *sends* the Gospel to them in order that they hear it and be believe. (AC V)

## VII. Lutheran Churches at the Crossroads

- A. Post-Christendom is a world between two worlds
  1. Pre-Church (Mission Field)
  2. Christendom
  3. Which world do we embrace?
- B. Note the differences
  1. For whom did the Gospel come?
    - a) Christendom: Primarily the church
    - b) Mission Field: Primarily the world (with the church as its proclaimer)
  2. What is the primary interface for hearing the Gospel?
    - a) Christendom: People access the local congregation in order to hear the Gospel.
    - b) Mission field: People hear the Gospel and then access the local congregation.

3. Who builds the bridge to hear the Gospel?
  - a) Christendom: The general culture builds the bridge which non-Christians cross to hear the Gospel.
  - b) Mission Field: The church builds the bridge which Christians cross in order to proclaim the Gospel.
4. Who are the primary proclaimers of the Gospel?
  - a) Christendom: The ordained pastor, administering the Gospel in the worship service. Non-Christians hear the Gospel by entering his sphere of influence.
  - b) Mission Field: The baptized proclaim the Gospel where they live, work, and play. Non-Christians hear the Gospel as the baptized enter their sphere of influence.
  - c) ***Key Gospel communicators are people indigenous to the non-Christian context. Our young people need to be equipped and deployed in order to reach the millennial generation.***
5. Who sets the context for Gospel proclamation?
  - a) Christendom: The church is in charge of the context. Gospel proclamation takes place in the worship service under the complete control of the pastor.
  - b) Mission Field: The non-Christian community is in charge of the context. Gospel proclamation takes place in places, times, and situations which the missionary does not control.

#### VIII. Christ in Charge

- A. Who's in charge of the ministry of the Gospel in this world?
  1. Christendom: The church is in charge.
  2. Mission Field: Christ is in charge through His Spirit
    - a) Our Lord demonstrated His Lordship on the Cross.
    - b) *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.* (John 12:24)
- B. Which road do we choose?
  1. Church in charge: Circle the Wagons; hang on to our sense of cultural "insidership" with all of our might.
  2. Christ in charge: Choose to become the "*elect outsiders*" once again.
- C. Christ in Charge with His First Disciples
  1. How do we serve God's world when we are not in charge?
    - a) The church has wrestled with that question from its inception.
    - b) The Lord has always succeeded in raising up a missionary people for His world.
  2. Consider the question posed by the disciples to our Lord.
    - a) *Lord will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?*
    - b) The disciples could not imagine ministry in the world where Israel was not "in charge".

3. Consider the response of our Lord.
  - a) *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth.*
  - b) Jerusalem is not the center of my Kingdom; my Kingdom belongs to the world.
  - c) You will be my witnesses far beyond your comfort zones.
4. Over time the disciples learned to live and witness in a world they did not control
  - a) St. Peter begins his first epistle with these words: *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion . . .”*
  - b) He ends them with these: *“She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings”*

#### D. Christ in Charge with Us, His 21<sup>st</sup> Century Disciples

1. The Lord has brought us to a time and place where the institutional church is not in charge of where she serves.
  - a) That is the best definition for what we call a mission field.
  - b) Mission fields are the dominion of the Royal Priests, God’s called missionary people.
2. We have been chosen and empowered by the Holy Spirit for this missionary age
  - a) *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* (Acts 1)
  - b) *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”* (Acts 2)
3. Anticipate the Lord raising up His Royal Priests —men and women—and empowering them by His Spirit for this time and place.
4. Commit ourselves to praying for, equipping, and deploying missionaries indigenous to this Post-Christendom world in which we live: Young people.