

**RETURN TO *MISSIO DEI*: INITIATING MISSIONAL TRANSITION
IN A SMALL CHURCH**

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Advisors:

Rev. Dr. Susan Kendall, Rev. Dr. Kevin Newburg,
Rev. Dr. J. Terry Todd.

Rev. Jimmy A. Lalljie,

Drew University,
Madison, New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

RETURN TO *MISSIO DEI*: INITIATING MISSIONAL TRANSITION IN A SMALL CHURCH

JIMMY LALLJIE

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, NEW HYDE PARK, NEW YORK.

This project is a recommendation of *missio Dei* theology as a true and authentic way for a small local church, Trinity Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod, in New Hyde Park, New York, to do ministry and mission within its context. It is a proposal, therefore, for this congregation to redefine its role and purpose as a group of followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

Changes have always made self-definition and redefinition of purpose necessary for institutions. The change that prompted this process at Trinity was recent renewal and the acquisition of new hope.

Instead of closing its doors as a dwindling congregation of aging German descendants this congregation was revamped recently through a merger with a small, newly planted congregation of younger immigrant families from the Caribbean, making it multicultural, intergenerational and hopeful overnight. My own prayerful reflections as the pastor, on a way forward for Trinity under these circumstances of rapid change led to the first part of the project. This was a tedious process to unearth the true meaning of mission and the role of the church and the discovery of three things, namely *missio Dei* theology, the missional church movement, and the idea of reductionism of the gospel message.

The natural progression from here, and hence the second accomplishment of this project is an analysis of Trinity's present ministry practices to recognize the shortcomings there, in

contrast to the examples of Christ's earthly ministry of service as we find them in the canonical Gospels. Having laid a finger on these shortcomings and on authenticity in church vocation the next step would be to craft tools to shift the paradigm at Trinity.

This project is an attempt to define a way forward for the church, to articulate the reason for a new direction and to lay down a method to initiate the transition. It does acknowledge that the process of getting the congregation to recognize its present shortcomings and to fully grasp the meaning of *missio Dei* and to develop a desire to become missional must be an ongoing one, perhaps over years, and should take many forms. It also discusses several paths that can be taken if there is change. It also reports on three activities that the church has been involved in that indicate that it is heading in the right direction.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	v
PREFACE.....	vi
.	
INTRODUCTION - THE PROJECT, THE PURPOSE AND THE CONTEXT.....	1
CHAPTER:	
1 <i>MISSIO DEI</i> EXPLORED	12
2 CHRISTIANITY'S DETOUR - THE REDUCTIONIST GOSPEL.....	27
3 REDUCTIONISM AND BEYOND AT TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH.....	34
4 THE SEVEN SERMON SERIES	44
CONCLUSION.....	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY	75

DEDICATION

My wife, Devika George, is a gifted musician (singer and guitarist), an extraordinary planner, executer and manager of events down to the last detail, including menu, program and decor, and serves the Lord and the people of God in the church with passion and dedication. I am blessed to be her husband and if this project is any achievement I dedicate it to her, for the example of strength, character and service to the Savior that she is. Her awesome love and support for me every step of the way in our journey as ministry partners is here gratefully acknowledged.

I dedicate this work also to my 17 year old daughter, Leah, the best pastor's kid (PK) ever. She is bold, bright, and beautiful and was ready and raring to conquer the college campus at BMCC but is disappointed that Covid-19 restricts her college experience to online learning so far. She is a talented visual artist, mature beyond her years, full of exuberant ambition, always willing to serve the Lord in the church and is my pride and joy. I trust that her generation would see the mainline church rise from the decline it experienced in my generation.

Lastly I dedicate this work to my mother, Seelatchnie Lalljie, and to the memory of my father, the late Oscar Balkaran Lalljie. My mother, now 81 years old, is a dedicated, lifelong church member who has lived faith, hope and love par excellence, and I am indebted to her for the humility, service and wisdom she gave/gives her children. My father was a lifelong educator (middle school principal), a teacher of life's lessons and was a unique mix of dogged self assurance and trust in the grace of God.

Soli Deo gloria.

PREFACE

As a community of followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the local church should regard His life and ministry on earth as its pattern and example. Two things marked His life and activities; He was present in the community amongst the people and He was there participating in and alleviating the sufferings and ills there. Many a local church today, however, in its activities and agenda, is a marked contrast to that. They are instead preoccupied with internally focused services, rituals, observances and administrative tasks. Such local churches then, over time, have deviated from the life and ministry of the Man from Galilee.

Missio dei is an understanding that the triune God sends the church into the community to join God in God's mission in the community. This is based, too, on the prior belief that God is and always was present in the community alleviating the suffering and 'fixing' the life situations of people; in Jesus Christ and now. It is about the church being and doing like Jesus, in the community. It is a missiological model and a model of church vocation.

This project makes the case for *missio Dei* by exploring what it is in some detail. It is then contrasted to the present ministry practices at Trinity Lutheran Church of New Hyde Park, NY, an LC-MS congregation and my ministry context. The practice of ministry there is considered to be mainly self-serving and based on the reductionist gospel of personal salvation; being saved and getting others saved.

The reductionist gospel refers to a reduction of the whole of the gospel or good news of Christianity. The gospel is commonly considered to be, from Romans 3: 21-25, the good news that God has made justification/righteousness (*dikaiosune*) possible, vs 21,

for all sinners, vs 23, purely by His grace, vs 24, not the sinners' merit or good works (apart from law), vs 21, through their faith, vs 22, in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, vs 25; His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection. All who believe are redeemed or receive salvation of their souls and eternal life and will not perish or suffer God's wrath in judgment, John 3: 16, Ephesians 2: 8-9.

While this is absolutely the golden nugget of the Christian message, when considered alone as is often done, it gives the impression that the mission of God is to save individuals for the afterlife. When the whole of Scripture is considered, however, it is evident that the redemptive work of God is also cosmic, social and temporal in scope. Missiologist Darrell Guder, from whom I derived the term "reductionist gospel" says of it, "In its tendency to reduce the gospel to individual salvation, it fails to confess the fullness of the message of the in breaking reign of God in Jesus Christ. . . Diminished or distorted in the process was the biblical understanding of the corporate and cosmic scope of salvation as the healing of all creation, the restoration of all things to the sovereign and gracious rule of God."¹ The proclamation of the church, then, of individual salvation for the afterlife, (where will you spend eternity?) to the exclusion of the cosmic, corporate (social) and temporal implications of the gospel is referred to as reductionism of the gospel and a deviation from the church's true vocation and mission.

The conclusion that is reached is that the church should return to what it was meant to be; *missio Dei*. Thus, this project proposes a method for Trinity to begin to make the transition to *missio Dei*, namely by leading the members to an understanding of the meaning of *missio Dei* and what it means to be a missional church (a church that puts *missio Dei* theology into practice), through the proclamation of a series of seven

¹ Darrell Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 24, 68

missional sermons.

The self-serving church is one with little or no focus outside of its members. Its activities, and style of worship are rigid and based on tradition and there is little or no room for innovation. The members tend to know each other, often for a long time, and are not accommodating to outsiders. Its message centers on personal spirituality and salvation and it exists presently to maintain its traditions and cater to the religious welfare of those on its roll.

By the attractional model a church concentrates its ministry on the 'number' of people who attend its services and other events/observances at the church's location (sanctuary/facility). It seeks to attract outsiders by making the 'experience' and the facility more appealing. Its messages tend to focus primarily on the eternal salvation of the souls, on guidelines for their moral rectitude and on receiving the blessings of God. These may lead to the attractional church being high in attendance and often thriving. Yet when they are the main or only focus of the church they belie a conviction of the church's purpose and vocation that is inaccurate or incomplete since its focus is primarily inward and self-serving, which may or may not coincide with the self-serving church model.

The missional church's primary, though not only, focus is service to the community outside the church. Its objective is to fulfill its mission, interpreted to mean that it was sent by God into the neighborhood around it to join God, Who is already present there, providing, serving, blessing and loving the people in need. It does not mean its worship services and observances or the needs of its members are not important. Nor does it mean that eternal salvation of the soul and personal morality and spirituality are not. But these are not its primary/only priority and preoccupation, which is being

authentic and true to its vocation, which vocation is understood to mean 'being sent on God's mission,' the *missio Dei*. Its attendance may or may not increase as a result but that does not matter. This project, then, is also about initiating transition in a small church from a totally self-serving/attractational model to an inclusion of the missional model.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the faith and hope of the members of Trinity Lutheran Church, New Hyde Park, to whom the missional sermons were preached. Their love and respect for me as their Pastor and their willingness to be led as the Lord leads is a great privilege and blessing. I would also like to thank my LAC, the Trinity Board of Trustees, for their contributions to this project by way of interest, insights and inquires, especially chairperson Joyce Burkhardt.

I would also like to thank my advisors; Dr Susan Kendall for her initial encouragement and guidance, Dr. Kevin Newburg for introducing me to missiology proper, the real meaning of *missio Dei*, the missional church and some of the top authors in the field like David Bosch, Darrell Guder and Alan Roxburgh; and Dr. J. Terry Todd for his leadership in closing out the project.

- INTRODUCTION -

THE PROJECT, THE PURPOSE AND THE CONTEXT

February 2016 was a watershed moment for Trinity Lutheran Church, a Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod affiliated congregation located in the New York City suburb of New Hyde Park, the ministry context of this project. That is when, together with me becoming its fifth Pastor, a small congregation of Guyanese immigrant families named Bethany, that I was leading at the time, joined Trinity. Before that Trinity was a congregation of a few dozen mostly elderly descendants of German immigrants. But all of a sudden, with the inclusion of Bethany, it doubled in size, became multiethnic and intergenerational and moved away from imminent closure. Suddenly it went from a church that was preoccupied with staving off closure to one that was looking for a way to do authentic ministry within its context.

(i) Historical Context

Trinity was founded in 1941, 79 years ago, by German immigrants, and was served by its founding pastor, Rev. Karl Kruger, for nearly forty years. Like many churches that came into being in the mid-twentieth century, Trinity, experienced dazzling growth and expansion including the acquisition of land and the construction of buildings in its first decades. It thrived as a medium sized church for years. By the time Rev. Kruger retired, the congregation, made up largely of descendants of German immigrants, had a membership of over four hundred.

Rev. Kruger's successor also had a long tenure at Trinity of twenty-five years. The first half of those years were successful and effective. In the latter years of his ministry, however, there were conflicts, controversy and significant membership decline.

Thereafter the church was rocked with steep membership loss and experienced church decline and decay, which has been a widespread phenomenon among mainline (old-line) denominations in the USA for some time now. The brief service years of the third and fourth pastors were focused on efforts to keep the church from closing.

Trinity's leaders, at that time, had even made plans for its closure. In the more recent past, however, Trinity has beaten the odds. The recent merger and prudent fiscal measures have brought financial stability as well as a whole new group of members suddenly. Because of the merger with the small, newly planted immigrant church, Bethany, and the calling of that church's missionary/church planter pastor to be Trinity's fifth called pastor, four years ago, it is now stable and thriving again.

Considering its history, though, maybe the notion of "the good old days" applies aptly to Trinity Lutheran Church, because it seems like things were so much better in times past. Surviving members from several decades ago may recall, with nostalgia, a time long ago when the pews were full and their church was bustling with people as well as the programs and projects that kept them active. They may even lament the decline.

(ii) Present Realities

But that was then! Trinity Lutheran Church must not look backward now but make plans for the future. Even though the 'hay days' might seem like a bygone era the present members and leadership must believe that God has big plans for them and embrace the challenge of being the church in this time and this place and take steps to understand this call and embrace it in new and applicable ways. Trinity has emerged from its decline somewhat and now it has to reflect on what it means to be the church and what the mission of the church is in order to go forward.

When I accepted its call and Trinity merged with Bethany, the members of the former Bethany, which was renting space in Queens Village, started to attend Services at the Trinity location and were admitted into Trinity's membership. Trinity's watershed moment was the calling of its first non-white Pastor to lead it into the future as a congregation with a whole new identity, half of it being elderly German descendants and the other half of it being younger East Indian Guyanese immigrant families.

Such was the ministry challenge for me, then; how does an immigrant Pastor from the English-speaking Caribbean lead a small local church that suddenly has a whole new identity in Long Island, New York? My ministry for the previous 13 years consisted of missionary work among Caribbean immigrants to New York, namely in Schenectady and Queens, giving me some relevant experience. In 2004 I planted Bethany in Queens Village, Queens, with a group of mostly East Indian Guyanese immigrants (Guyana, though in South America, is considered a part of the English-speaking Caribbean) which I led as a new church-plant for several years. Not until 2012 was it fully constituted and 'rostered' as a member congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, when I was called to be its Pastor.

Trinity Lutheran Church is now a 70+ members, multiethnic, intergenerational church. While some of the members are seniors, many are young adults and there are also families with children and youths. The Sunday Service is a blend of traditional Lutheran liturgy and contemporary styles but it is also partial 'high church' in that it always includes Holy Communion. The church is administered by an active Board of Trustees. From all indications the merger was a success in that people of different ethnicities, cultures and national heritage now work and worship together in cordiality, friendship

and fellowship in the Body of Christ. A peaceful, enthusiastic aura pervaded congregational gatherings that were held before the Covid-19 pandemic and there is now a network of new relationships and connections within the church.

Aside from the Sunday Worship there is activity now at Trinity by way of a functioning Ladies Guild, a Youth Group, a Sunday School, and a group of women, called Sew and Sew, which used to meet each week (stopped because of the Covid-19 pandemic) to sew quilts and to make crochet blankets for charity. Each month canned groceries are collected for the Lutheran Social Services food pantry. In addition to having a large church building this church has physical facilities that can be vital resources for mission and ministry such as a large parking lot, a large hall/gym (Kruger Hall) and a small Preschool in the basement of the edifice, that provides employment for three persons.

(iii) Ecclesiastical Reflection

As the Pastor I am faced with the responsibility of forging a ministry strategy and mission plan to lead this church that has a new look and needs a new outlook. So I began to ponder and pray and reflect on what it means to be the church and what the church is called to do and wondered what pattern could be followed. However, the sheer variety in the practice of ministry and what it means to be a church that exists today is simply staggering.

This variety of examples of what it means to be the church today varies from high church, to traditional and liturgical to contemporary or blended styles of worship; from the nurture of faith through spontaneous, sensational worship, bible study and prayer meeting to building up a closely-knitted household-of-faith community for fellowship

and support; from championing social justice causes and serving the poor and the underprivileged bringing them hope to proclaiming salvation to the lost and unsaved complete with choosing one's eternal destination at an 'altar call'; from declaring a theology of 'prosperity if you have faith' to clamoring for moral uprightness and personal piety by being 'Spirit filled'.

Which and how many of these should constitute a church's vocation and purpose, its mission? In fact in today's world where everyone seems connected through social media and where you can "go to church" from your own living room by watching any number of Church Services of your choice on TV and uploading/calling in your offering, some are asking whether the local church even has a place in modern society or whether the local church is now obsolete?

The complexity of these matters was greatly increased with the onset of the Corona virus, COVID- 19, pandemic in March, 2020, and the measures that had to be taken to slow its spread. The main measure was the restriction of gatherings of people, or 'lock down', which meant the closing down of non-essential work, bars, theaters, stores, malls, schools and yes churches. So as a response many churches resorted to airing modified services via social media platforms like Facebook and Zoom. Going to 'church from home' went from an option to a necessity overnight. All this brought a whole new dimension to ministry for many pastors, including myself, which may become a routine feature of church life in the future.

The matter of what a church should be, what its role is and what its mission ought to be are the subject of a section of Christian theology called ecclesiology or the study of the Church which, to stay on course, a church should reflect on from time to time. But the

role and the mission of a local church is not often reviewed or evaluated. It tends to be embedded, a part of that church's tradition that is passed on from one generation of members to another. In order, however, to ensure that it is authentic in its mission and ministry, that it is a true church, such ecclesiological review and evaluation is useful and valuable. More importantly, too, it can be seen as necessary in ensuring that the ministry activities of a local church are relevant to changes in the geographic/demographic context.

Michael W. Goheen, underscores the importance of the task of reflection on and evaluating the existing ecclesiology pointing out that,

Ecclesiology is not simply an academic exercise to get our doctrine of the church correct for the sake of orthodox theology. It is the hard work of returning to the Scriptures and asking the deepest fundamental questions: Who are we? What is our role in the biblical story? What is our vocation? What does it mean to be the faithful people of God? How are we called to serve God's purpose? How do we fulfill that calling at our particular time and in our particular context? How is that context forming us in ways contrary to our identity? It is not saying too much to insist that ecclesiological reflection is a matter of life and death for the church.²

Goheen, a scholar of renowned missiologist Leslie Newbigin said of him,

Ecclesiology for Newbigin was about much more than simply the internal life of the institutional church. It went much deeper than worship, preaching, sacraments, leadership, church order, ecclesial structures, and the like. It is a matter of recovering our missionary identity. And reclaiming our missionary identity was not simply about doing more evangelism, or a more extensive engagement with social and political issues in the public life, or even increased programs of mercy and justice. It was much deeper than all of this.³

Dr. Kevin Newburg has pointed out that for Newbigin the missionary identity of the church does not pertain to what the church does. Instead the very nature of the authentic church is missionary.

² Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2018), 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

The need for my church, Trinity, and any church for that matter, to reflect on itself and evaluate its role and purpose at certain times, watershed or otherwise, is warranted by the cultural changes around it. Alan Roxburgh calls one of the changes in America today marginalization, about which he declares,

One thing is clear; in contrast with the long history of the Christian church in the Western world, congregations must now learn how to live the gospel as a distinct people who are no longer at the cultural center. The emerging experience of the churches is indeed that of being on the culture's margins.⁴

Another cultural change that impacts churches and the need to evaluate their role and mission is that of secularization or the increasing de-emphasis and abandonment of God-based religion.

In Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade. Meanwhile the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular," now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.⁵

Roxburgh indicates that, "Secularism continues to oppose religion, while technology has emerged as a major source of power and authority in modern culture. Both confront Christian faith with fundamental questions."⁶

(iv) Missional movement

The cultural changes around Christianity should elicit from the Church a perspective and an approach to ministry and mission that are appropriate to the new cultural milieu. Well, it has! Not only is it time for the Church in America to rethink its

⁴ Alan Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997) 1.

⁵ "An Update on America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019, <http://www.pewforum.org>.

⁶ Alan Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality*, vii.

identity and its mission in relation to the culture that threatens to unravel it but since the 2000s there has come into being a movement of rethinking what the church should be and do. It is called the missional movement.

Michael Frost, one of the missional movement's proponents, says of it, "When I use the M-word, I'm doing so to describe the wholesale and thorough reorientation of the church around mission. . .I'm not the only person calling for this complete paradigm shift for the church."⁷ Ed Stezer, in referring to *missio Dei* declares that,

During the past half century, there has been significant shift from understanding mission as simply the geographical expansion of the Christian faith from the West to the non-Christian world, toward a more expansive understanding of God's mission- particularly within a Trinitarian theological framework.⁸

The Latin phrase, *missio Dei*, which means the "sending of God" or the "mission of God," has become the touchstone concept of the twenty-first century's theology of mission. The word missional is the adjectival form of mission (missionary). The missional movement is a shift from mission as the sending of individuals (missionaries) to start new churches toward the recognition of mission as the sending of the church itself into its neighborhood (context); the Father has sent the Son into the world, the Father and the Son sends the Spirit to renew the Church and the Triune God sends the Church into the world and its culture. Thus the missional church is the church whose congregational life and practice consists of beliefs, programs and activities based on the understanding that it has been sent into the world to do and fulfill God's purpose.

Previously the church's identity was defined in terms of being called, as in "from

⁷ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey To The Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011) 16-17.

⁸ Brad Brisco and Lance Ford, *The Missional Quest: Becoming A Church Of The Long Run* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013) 9.

darkness into marvelous light," 1 Peter 2:9b, and as in "the called out people of God," the *ecclesia*, called out from the world and separated from the world for redemption and righteousness. In the missional movement the church's identity is being recognized more in the sense of being sent as in "as the Father has sent Me, so send I you," John 20:21. The church is indeed redeemed by the Son, but equally important is that it is also sent into the world by the Father, Who is a sender or is missionary by nature, and by the Son, and empowered by the Spirit, to do what God is doing, the *missio Dei*, wherever the church is located.

(v) The Project

This project explores *missio Dei* theology, which in practice is called the missional church, as a way of understanding what mission is and hence a new and authentic ministry path and direction for Trinity Lutheran Church. The prevailing theological understanding that undergirds the practice of ministry presently at Trinity, namely the reductionist gospel because it is a reduction or incomplete version of the Lord's intention for His Church, is also examined as an insufficient expression of the Church's intended purpose and vocation. The struggle, then, is to formulate a method for the transition of Trinity, my local congregational setting, to a missional church.

To consider becoming missional is a complete paradigm shift for a church. The process is described by Michael Frost as, "a wholesale change in the way Christians *do* and *be* the church . . . the task of dismantling so many of the arcane institutional structures it is now beholden to and to bravely face the future with imagination and courage."⁹ Since this has to do with "being transformed by the renewing of your minds,"

⁹ Frost, *Road to Missional: Journey To The Center of the Church*, 16-17

Romans 12: 2b, and the pastor has the opportunity each week via the sermon he preaches to challenge the congregants to think differently, a Seven Sermon Series was chosen as that transitional method. The series would certainly not immediately transform the church to missional, but it can plant the seeds of faith and fertilize the minds of congregants with the ideas of joining God in service to the neighborhood, initiating the transition, which could possibly be a long, slow and difficult journey.

(vi) The Purpose

Seven missional sermons, then, form the core of the project to lead the members of Trinity Lutheran Church to see mission as *missio Dei* and as the very essence of what it means to be a church. The sermons proclaim and highlight the Scriptural foundations for the essentials of *missio Dei* and make a case for embracing it. Pertinent texts are interpreted with a missional hermeneutic. The aim is to show that, as Dr. Kevin Newberg once indicated, it is in the participation in God's mission, the *missio Dei*, that the church becomes the faithful people of God, rather than by being the faithful people of God they embark (or make plans to embark) on the mission of God.

The reality about Trinity is that it is primarily a self-serving church with a small amount of attractional qualities. Its new focus then must be to transition to a missional church. Missional however is contextual. There is no blueprint that can show every church how to be missional except in general theological terms. That is because to be missional is to join God in the ways God is already active in one's unique neighborhood/community. As such it depends on what that neighborhood/community is where one's church is located.

The geographical context where Trinity is located and hence called to minister

and do mission, is a New York City suburb, New Hyde Park, as opposed to an inner-city location or rural underdeveloped community. New Hyde Park is residential and made up of mostly families of professionals who commute to jobs in various commercial centers outside of New Hyde Park. Lately there has been a recent influx of South Indian immigrants into the neighborhood. Hence of importance for being missional is: what is going on in this setting? How is God active here, and how can the church join in?

As this project plants the seeds of *missio Dei*/missional church in the hearts and minds of the members of Trinity and they are led by the Spirit they will begin to see their role and the role of their church in terms of serving with the Lord in the community of New Hyde Park. Particular situations and realities in the New Hyde Park community would be identified and undertaken as ministries of the church. Though multicultural and intergenerational, the members of Trinity have worked well together inside the church, but now they must collaborate on following Christ outside the church. But first it is important to reflect on ecclesiology to discern the church's true vocation.

CHAPTER 1

MISSIO DEI EXPLORED

"and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," Acts 1: 8b

(i) History

According to the biblical testimony, the parting words of Jesus of Nazareth to His followers just prior to His Ascension, was an assertion that they will be His witnesses in various locations. This would come to pass in time, spawning the Church as a consequence of the Resurrection. Since God's Word "will never pass away," Matthew 24:35b, this assertion is for Trinity Lutheran Church of New Hyde Park also, as it is for all churches in all times and in all places. We have recognized that *missio Dei* theology provides authentic witness to Christ, referred to as being a missional church, in its location/context; the village of New Hyde Park and the adjoining town of North Hempstead, in New York, USA, at the start of the third decade of the 21st century.

For a while, the "church growth" movement led in a new way on how to be witnesses in the '70s, '80s and early '90s. Their response was to offer marketing ideas and techniques to the pastors and leaders of rapidly declining churches throughout the United States. "For a while the new way of "doing church" appeared successful. . . as customer service became a ministry mantra throughout church leadership circles."¹⁰ This is an example of the attractional church model. Let us note that it is usually the declining churches that do reflection on how they are witnessing and look for better ways. "Thriving" churches tend to continue doing whatever they are doing in whatever way they are doing it, since they are "thriving."

¹⁰ Brad Brisco and Lance Ford, *Missional Essentials* (Kansas City: The House Studio, 2012), 4

Following closely on the heels of the "church growth" movement, chronologically, was the missional movement which, as was mentioned in the Introduction, responded to the many cultural and sociological changes that were affecting Christianity as the 20th century drew to a close. Missional theology and the missional church model became an integral aspect of missiology in theological academic circles and with church strategists and parish planners in the first two decades of the 21st century following the publication of *Missional Church - A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* in 1998.¹¹

This book was the result of research led by the Gospel and Culture Network, a movement of the 1980s across many Western Churches, that itself emerged as a result of the publication of Lesslie Newbigin's short inquiry *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*.¹² The former Bishop of the Church of South India's book was his response to the steep decline he found in the churches in the West after he returned from over three decades of missionary service to the Church of South India. In a sense the missional movement began with Newbigin.

The word "missional" is of recent coinage (1998 *Missional Church* publication). It describes both people and churches who see themselves and function as missionaries in their local context. Brisco and Ford give us a working definition of missional saying, "it describes a church that sees God's mission as the organizing principle that defines, shapes and *sends* the church to participate in what God is already doing in the world."¹³ As can be recognized above "missional" is extrapolated from God's mission or *missio Dei*. While

¹¹ Guder, Darrell L., ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998)

¹² Lesslie Newbigin, (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1983)

¹³ Brisco and Ford, *Missional Essentials*, 5

missional is a recent concept, the *missio Dei* doctrine from which it is derived is not.

Concerning the history of the term *missio Dei* Christopher J. H. Wright wrote,

The term *missio Dei*, "the mission of God," has a long history. It seems to go back to a German missiologist Karl Hartenstein. He coined it as a way of summarizing the teaching of Karl Barth, "who, in a lecture on mission in 1928, had connected mission with the doctrine of the trinity. Barth and Hartenstein went on to make clear that mission is grounded in an intratrinitarian movement of God himself."¹⁴ . . . So the phrase originally meant "the sending of God"- in the sense of the Father's sending of the Son and their sending of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

According to David Bosch, "In a paper read at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth ((1932) 1957) became one of the first theologians to articulate mission as an activity of God himself."¹⁶ David M. Whitworth also acknowledges Barth's foundational role by saying, "Barth is widely recognized for giving birth to the *missio Dei* concept, and he was the first in the twentieth century to speak of mission as the activity of God himself."¹⁷ Bosch wrote further that Barth's influence on missionary thinking reached a peak at the 1952 Willingen, Germany, Conference of the International Missionary Council (integrated into the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC in 1961). Here understanding mission as the mission of God or *missio Dei* began to emerge.

In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. (cf Aagaard 1973: 11-15; 1974: 421)¹⁸
It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church

¹⁴ L.A. Hoedemaker, "The People of God and the Ends of the Earth," in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction*, ed. A. Camps, L.A. Hoedemaker and M.R. Spindler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 163

¹⁵ Christopher Wright, *The Mission Of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 62-63

¹⁶ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991) 399

¹⁷ David M. Whitworth, *Missio Dei and the Means of Grace: A Theology of Participation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications) 5

¹⁸ Johannes Aagaard, Trends in Missiological Thinking in the Sixties, *International Review of Mission* vol 62 (1973): 11-15

(Moltmann 1977: 64)¹⁹. Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument of that mission (Aagaard 1973: 13). There is church because there is mission, not vice versa (Aagaard 1974: 423).^{20 21}

But Barth himself, however, deferred the credit to the early church.

Must not even the most faithful missionary, the most convinced friend of missions, have reason to reflect that the term *missio* was in the ancient Church an expression of the Trinity- namely the expression of the divine sending forth of self, the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world? Can we indeed claim that we can do it any other way?²²

Whitman clarifies too that, "Barth's reference to the ancient church and the illumination of the Divine sending the Divine is identified in the post- biblical writings of Augustine who also articulated mission as an activity of the Triune God."²³ The evidence is clear, that *missio Dei*, mission as an activity of God, not of the church, is not new. But there has been a detour! The clarion call, then, should be heralded; return to *missio Dei*.

(ii) Mission As a Trinitarian Attribute:

Missio Dei theology, emerging as it did at the 1952 Willingen Conference of the IMC, fundamentally challenges the previously held notions about mission by asserting that it is primarily not an activity of the church but a Trinitarian attribute. Bosch, who played a major role in popularizing *missio Dei* as a mission theology model, posits, "Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer,

¹⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SMC Press, 1977) 64.

²⁰ Anna Marie Aagaard, *Missio Dei in katholischer Sicht, Evangelische Theologie* vol 34 (1974): 423

²¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 400

²² Whitworth *Missio Dei and the Means of Grace: A Theology of Participation*, 5 (Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten*, 114-15)

²³ *Ibid* 5

and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate (cf LWF 1988: 6-10)."^{24 25}

The theology of the *missio Dei* defines the church and its mission within the framework of the doctrine of the Triune God. Bosch explains that,

Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classic doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the Church into the world.²⁶

Former missionary in the Middle East, Peter Pikkert agrees. "The fundamental idea of *missio Dei* is that Christian mission is rooted in the Trinitarian nature of God."²⁷ He sheds light on its importance by saying *missio Dei* is "today's foremost theology of missions," in the title of his book *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei - An appraisal of today's foremost theology of missions*.²⁸

David Whitworth tells us that H.H. Rosin²⁹ gave evidence of the Scriptural basis of the *missio Dei* concept when he states that,

For this after all indicates an action, which does not point indiscriminately to all kinds of happenings in the world, but only to one incomprehensible event, namely that God, the creator of all things, submerged himself in his own world as a stranger, as a displaced person, an outcast, in solidarity with other outcasts and strangers, who in this world pursues a very special, hidden road in order to liberate it.³⁰

²⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 402,

²⁵ *Together in God's Mission* (Geneva: LWF, 1988) 6-10

²⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 399

²⁷ Peter Pikkert, *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei: An appraisal of today's foremost theology of missions* (Ancaster, ON: ALEV Books, 2017) 7

²⁸ Peter Pikkert, (Ancaster, ON: ALEV Books, 2017)

²⁹ H.H. Rosin *Missio Dei: An Examination of the Origin, Content, and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* (Leiden: Interuniversity Institute, 1972)

³⁰ Whitworth, *Missio Dei and the Means of Grace: A Theology of Participation*, 4

What is significant in coming to grips with the meaning of *missio Dei*, as German missiologist and major proponent of *missio Dei* during the 1950s and 1960s, George F. Vicedom³¹, points out, is the theological reality that God is both sender and sendee. "If we want to do justice to the biblical conception, the *missio Dei* must be understood also as an attributive genitive. God becomes not only the sender but simultaneously the One who is sent."³²

"The *missio Dei* does not begin with the church, a person, or a context. The *missio Dei* begins with the Triune God. The *missio Dei* is made manifest through the activity of the Triune God in which the church and persons participate."³³ That is why an important part of the definition of missional is participation in and joining with God in what God is already doing in one's neighborhood. God not only sends the church but God is sent, is present and active in the community already. To be missional is to join God. The church's mission is to join God in what God is already actively accomplishing in the neighborhood.

(iii) *Missio Dei* Shifts the Paradigm:

Whitworth is clear about the impact of *missio Dei* theology.

For centuries Catholic and Protestant practice in 'missional activities' was supported by the theory that mission is simply an activity of the church moving into the world and was not understood or articulated as first being an activity of God. The twentieth century witnessed a shift in missiological theory from mission

³¹ Georg F. Vicedom *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission*, the Witnessing Church Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965) 7

³² Whitworth, *Missio Dei and the Means of Grace: A Theology of Participation*, 6

³³ Ibid 5

belonging to the church to being an activity of the Triune God that is intended for all and invites all to participate.³⁴

He says further that, "theologians and the church alike have been wrongly identifying mission from an anthropocentric vantage."³⁵

The magnitude of the paradigm shift that *missio Dei* brings to mission theology is better understood when we take into consideration what Bosch said about its meaning before the 1950s.

It referred to (a) the sending of missionaries to a designated territory, (b) the activities undertaken by such missionaries, (c) the geographical area where the missionaries were active, (d) the agency which dispatched the missionaries, (e) the non-Christian world or "mission field," or (f) the center from which the missionaries operated on the "mission field" (cf Ohm 1962:52f)³⁶. . . (g) a local congregation without a resident minister and still dependent on the support of an older, established church,³⁷

Bosch also confirms the currency of other common notions of mission as faith propagation, conversion of the unbelievers (soteriological) and founding of new churches (ecclesiological)³⁸. Then he brings to our attention this shift in the mission paradigm. He points out that at the IMC Conference of 1952,

Willigen began to flesh out a new model. It recognized that the church could be neither the starting point, nor the goal of mission. God's salvific work precedes both church and mission. We should not subordinate mission to the church nor the church to mission; both should, rather, be taken up into the *missio Dei*, which now became the overarching concept. The *missio Dei* constitutes the *missiones ecclesiae*. The churches changes from being the sender to being the one sent (cf Gunther 1970: 105-114).^{39 40}

³⁴ Whitworth *Missio Dei and the Means of Grace: A Theology of Participation*, 5

³⁵ *Ibid* 4

³⁶ Thomas Ohm, *Machet zu Jurgern alle Volker: Theorie der Mission* (Freiburg/B: Erich Wevel Verlag, 1962) 52

³⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Missions : Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 1

³⁸ *Ibid* 1

³⁹ Wolfgang Gunther *Von Edinburg nach Mexico City: Die: Ekklesiologischen Bemuhunge der Weltmissionskonferenzen* (Stuttgart:Evang.Missionsverlag. 1970)

⁴⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 379

Peter Pikkert describes the older model as, ". . . the salvation-of-the-soul, Christian discipleship, church-planting model of their theological fathers."⁴¹

(iv) *Missio Dei* - A Call to Be Incarnational

The human Jesus is the incarnation of God; the coming in human flesh of the Divine, the Word become flesh, John 1:14a. The purpose of the incarnation was the redemption of humanity through His atoning sacrifice, namely His death on a Roman crucifixion cross. His life on earth, however, was also incarnational in that the virtues of compassion, care, acceptance, forgiveness, love, hope, mercy and many others, became flesh in a real human being in Jesus of Nazareth as He lived out His humanity in 1st century C. E. Palestine. Until these virtues are lived out they are no more than notions, thoughts, ideals and aspirations.

Jesus, however, brought them to life and lived them out by befriending outcasts and forgiving law breakers. He accepted tax collectors and adulterers and delivered and healed lepers, the demon possessed, the disabled, the blind and other sick peoples. This was God in action then and God is still active in our own communities today. The missional movement challenges the local church to go beyond all of its inward focused, self-serving activities and observances by identifying itself as being sent into its neighborhood to engage the culture. It must follow Christ amongst neighbors by incarnating love, understanding, acceptance, cooperation, encouragement, peace and

⁴¹ Pikkert, *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei, An appraisal of today's foremost theology of missions*, 41

mercy.

About living out incarnation Krin Van Tatenhove and Rob Mueller counsel, "

What Christians call the Incarnation is certainly not a single act. It is a life giving metaphor, an invitation to follow for all who will listen. Personally how can we en flesh the values of love, grace and justice? As faith communities, how can our collective embodiment of these values shine even brighter? The answers to these questions must always unfold right here, right now, exactly where God has planted us. It will happen *in this place*.⁴²

Alan Hirsch's⁴³ points to an incarnational understanding of *missio Dei* and being missional when Brisco and Ford quote him as saying, "The Incarnation not only qualifies God's acts in the world, but must also qualify ours. If God's central way of reaching his world was to incarnate himself in Jesus, then our way of reaching the world should likewise be incarnational."⁴⁴

(v) *Missio Dei* Is Eschatological

The local church being the incarnation, the taking on of flesh, of love and hope and peace, grace, and mercy in the local community is the second leg of the missional tripod, the first being its 'sent' identity, in that, "the church doesn't just send missionaries, the church is the missionary."⁴⁵ The third area to which the local church must look if it is to become missional is recognizing its eschatological reality. Eschatology is the theology of the end time events including the Messianic reign and the Second Coming of Jesus, the Christ, and the establishing of the kingdom of God.

⁴² Krin Van Tatenhove and Rob Mueller, *Neighborhood Church- Transforming Your Congregation into a Power House For Mission* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2019) 2

⁴³ Alan Hirsch *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006) 133

⁴⁴ Brisco and Ford *The Missional Quest*, 30

⁴⁵ Ibid 23

Missio Dei is mission as inaugurated eschatology. Inaugurated eschatology is the view that in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, the kingdom and the reign of God was begun or inaugurated in the present. That much He declared at the beginning of His ministry, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near: repent, and believe in the good news," Mk 1:15 (NRSV). If it began and is here, then where or when is it? This was the curiosity of the Pharisees in the 17th chapter of Luke's Gospel. Jesus' answer was definitive.

²⁰Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ²¹nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you. Luke 17: 20-21 (NRSV)

We must note that other versions like the NKJV, the Good News Version and the NIV render the last phrase as, "the kingdom of God is within you." The kingdom of God is among or within us in that it is as the followers/believers of Jesus Christ live out or incarnate the kingdom virtues of mercy and peace and justice and acceptance and forgiveness and kindness and love to, with and amongst their neighbors that the kingdom comes.

To be missional the church has to incarnate the kingdom virtues and to incarnate the kingdom virtues the church brings the kingdom, the eschatological reality. Thus by being missional, participating with the Lord in the community, the church is manifesting the reign of God and the eschatological reality. Rather than being confined to their space and self-interest, missional churches must seek to live out the coming of the kingdom in today's culture as, led by the Spirit, they incarnate the hope and grace and mercy and love of Christ. About this Darrell Guder says, "In its tendency to make the church into the institution that administers that individual salvation, it fails to confess the fullness of the

church's vocation to be, do, and say the witness to that reign of God breaking in now in Jesus Christ.⁴⁶

According to the American phenomenologist Dallas Willard real mission is eschatological and the kingdom of God comes in our missional lives. He is quoted in *Neighborhood Church* as saying, "When Jesus directs us to pray, "Thy kingdom come," He does not mean that we should pray for it to come into existence. Rather we pray for it to take over all points in the personal, social, and political order where it is now excluded....With this prayer we are invoking it, as in faith we are acting it, into the real world of our daily existence."⁴⁷

(vi) Twelve Points of *Missio Dei* (Summary)

Missio Dei means:

- (1) Mission of God or the sending of God, is true mission, not church planting or soul saving alone, contrary to common notions.
- (ii) The Father sent the Son into the world, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to renew the Church, the Triune God sends the church into the world.
- (iii) Mission is a Trinitarian attribute and activity, not an agenda of the church.
- (iv) God is sender and sendee, God is in the world, active in our communities, present, immanent, not distant or dormant.

⁴⁶ Darrell Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 24

⁴⁷ Krin Van Tatenhove and Rob Mueller, *Neighborhood Church, Transforming Your Congregation into a Power House For Mission*, a quote from the title page

(v) God is present with us in the here and now healing, lifting, restoring, defending, providing and calls the redeemed to join God. This is the missing part of the reductionist gospel, the saving of souls for heaven.

(vi) The vocation of the church is to be missional which means that the church is sent into the world to join God in what God is already doing in its neighborhood.

(vii) The church is missionary by its very nature, not in sending missionaries but the church is the missionary sent by God. God has a church for God's mission not God has a mission for God's church

(viii) Mission is incarnational. The church is sent to incarnate (make real by its actions) the love, mercy, compassion, kindness, hope, forgiveness and peace of Christ in its community.

(ix) Mission is eschatological. The missional church, in emulating Christ through love and hope and mercy in the world evidences the kingdom of God in the here and now.

(x) Missional hermeneutics, a recognition of God's liberating activity in the circumstances of the day, should be applied to various pericopes of Scripture to grasp the call to be missional.

(xi) Authentic church mission, ministry and even lives are patterned after the example of the earthly, (historical) Jesus as depicted in the Evangelists' accounts in the Canonical Gospels.

(xii) The challenge to today's church is paradigm shift, from reductionism to *missio Dei*, from being self-centered, inward focused to outward, neighborhood focus.

(vii) *Missio Dei* In Concrete Terms

Let us be reminded that as George Vicedom⁴⁸ puts it, "The mission is work that belongs to God. This is the first implication of *missio Dei*. God is the Lord, the One who gives the orders, the Owner, the One who takes care of things. He is the Protagonist in the mission."⁴⁹ Secondly God's love is His attribute *par excellence*. David Bosch wrote: "God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people."⁵⁰

But what is God's purpose and objective? For the apostle Paul, "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself", 2 Corinthians 5: 19 (NRSV). For the writer of the Epistle to the Ephesians it is "to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth," Eph. 1: 10b (NRSV). Christopher Wright's view on God's purpose in mission is, "The mission of God is ultimately to restore his whole creation to what it was intended to be- God's creation ruled over by redeemed humanity, giving glory and praise to its creator."⁵¹ Guder's view of the goal of God's mission, *missio Dei*, is expressed in his rebuttal of the reduction of the gospel to salvation of the soul. Such a view, he points out, diminishes or distorts, "the biblical understanding of the corporate and cosmic scope of salvation as the healing of all creation, the restoration of all things to the sovereign and gracious rule of God." ⁵²

So God's project and agenda is transforming and renewing all things. Its scope is worldwide, all inclusive, cosmic, across cultures, religions and ethnicity. And the church

⁴⁸ Georg F. Vicedom *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission* the Witnessing Church Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965) 5

⁴⁹ Pikkert, *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei: An appraisal of today's foremost theology of missions*, 8

⁵⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 402

⁵¹ Pikkert, *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei: An appraisal of today's foremost theology of missions*, 11

⁵² Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, 68

and anyone else is invited to join in and participate with God in making the world a better place, and not just to gain converts to Christianity. "This may include developing better medical services, teaching in national schools, digging wells, militating for ecologically responsible legislation, promoting better agricultural methods, sponsoring projects for orphans, and involvement in dozens of other such worthwhile projects."⁵³

It is in joining God in these activities that the church goes outside of its walls, turning its focus outward, becoming relevant within its context in the process and makes a difference in its neighborhood. In doing so it is also emulating the example of the historical Jesus. In this sense *missio Dei* uses a 'Christology from below' construct meaning that it emphasizes Jesus' humanity and His example of selfless service as the pattern for the missional church.

This chapter was a journey of discovering and understanding *missio Dei* theology, so that Trinity Lutheran Church could embrace it as a foundation for its way forward. We discovered that *missio Dei* means that the church is the missionary, sent by the Triune God to impact its context, which is its authentic vocation. In doing so the Church/church becomes incarnational and eschatological by joining God in a reconciling, transformative role. The church has no agenda of its own. Only God has an agenda in which the Church/church is privileged to join God. Quite frankly, this is a huge paradigm shift for Trinity and one that will require a lot of hard work to persuade the congregation. What is encouraging, however, is how easy it is to appreciate the flaws of the opposite of *missio Dei*; the church develops its own agenda and a myopic vision, becoming self-centered, self-serving and self-absorbed through a reductionist understanding of its role, to which

⁵³ Pikkert, *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei: An appraisal of today's foremost theology of missions*, 55

we must now turn our attention.

CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIANITY'S DETOUR - THE REDUCTIONIST GOSPEL

Despite what people think, within the Christian family and outside it, the point of Christianity isn't "to go to heaven when you die." ---N. T. Wright

A local church, regardless of its denominational affiliation, its size or who its pastor is, does not exist in a vacuum. It is located within a particular society or community which provides its context and from which its members come often though not always. That context can have various degrees of the countless ills and challenges of society such as poverty, crime, various forms of war, homelessness, social injustice, racism and racial strife, prejudice, discrimination, underdevelopment, unemployment, broken homes, domestic violence, alcoholism and other substance abuse, drug trafficking, limited educational and /skills training opportunities, poor health care provisions, mental illness, multi-religion, multicultural discord, political unrest and pollution and other forms of destruction of the natural environment. The members of the church are impacted by this milieu of the human condition. Whatever the mix of societal ills that comprise the context of a church they would have to be confronted by that church if it is at all to be of relevance to the existential reality around it and of its members.

Jesus of Nazareth, Whom the church follows, emulates and worships as Lord and Savior, did address the existential realities of His day, if we take the canonical Gospels as historically reliable accounts of the historical Jesus. According to those accounts He healed sick people, stood up for justice for an accused woman whose rights were being violated, befriended outcasts like tax collectors, crossed religious and cultural lines to serve the needs of others, settled family disputes and fed hungry people, amongst other

things. Yet even a casual observation of churches across denominational lines and geographic regions yield evidence that it is more normative for congregations to by-and-large ignore the existential realities that constitute their context. Instead their time, talent and treasures tend to be focused on the morality and spirituality of their members and the eternal salvation of their souls especially in and through the worship events. As the saying goes they are "so heavenly minded that they are of little earthly good." But to understand the gospel to be about eternal salvation of the soul and spirituality in the traditional sense only is to reduce the gospel from what it means in its entirety.

What can arguably be considered the grand theme that permeates the Synoptic gospels is that of the kingdom of God or in Greek, *basileia tou theou*. Difficulty in translation should be recognized since *basileia* is not the same as earthly kingdoms of domination, exploitation and limited boundaries. In a real sense the earthly ministry of Jesus, the gospel or redemption cannot be fully understood without taking into account the *basileia*. About its meaning an NRSV Study Bible excursus says it should, "convey the sense of God's saving power over all creation, already inaugurated in a new way with the incarnation and ministry of Jesus, and continued in the faithful ministry of the believing community, while not yet fully manifest."⁵⁴

Jesus began His ministry with a declaration that the kingdom of God (of heaven) is near, Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:15, Luke 10:9, and He taught about its meaning, for instance in the kingdom parables, in the Beatitudes and in the Lord's prayer. It is an integral part of Jesus' message and hence the gospel, and it pertains to life here on earth, (inaugurated eschatology), it is about the rule, reign and realm of God and Jesus' life of

⁵⁴ Walter J. Harrelson, gen.ed., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible (NRSV)* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003) 1955

loving service on earth exemplifies it. Therefore the church's proclamation, ministry and mission ought not to exclude it. To do so robs these of the *diakonia*, or service. The proclamation will not include a call to serve in context, ministry would be self-serving and mission would be soul saving (soteriological) and church planting (ecclesiological) and not Trinitarian, and the gospel would be reduced.

The term "reductionist gospel" is used to refer to the widely held view that the purpose of the Church is to save souls, make disciples/converts, and plant churches to the neglect of the social obligations of the church. For example the prayer "For the Mission of the Church" in the Lutheran Service Book, the chapter on Prayers, Intercessions and Thanksgivings is,

Almighty God, You have called Your Church to witness that in Jesus Christ You have reconciled us to Yourself. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may proclaim the good news of Your salvation so that all who hear it may receive the gift of salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.⁵⁵

Donald G. Bloesch shows us the Roman Catholic position on this by writing

At the Second Vatican Council the spiritual character of the mission of the church was reaffirmed, as we see in the "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity": "For this the Church was founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father, she might bring all men to share in Christ's saving redemption."⁵⁶"It declares that the "mission of the Church concerns the salvation of men, which is to be achieved by belief in Christ and by His grace."⁵⁷

Make no mistake about it, these ("the gift of salvation" and "the salvation of men, which is to be achieved by belief in Christ") are all 'part and parcel' of the Church's message and vocation. But they become contentious when they are thought to be the 'end all' of a church's vocation, mission and ministry. Alone they are a reduction of the total of

⁵⁵ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006) 305

⁵⁶ Walter M. Abbot, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966) 491

⁵⁷ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology, Volume 2* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1978) 163

what the Church has been called to be and do, and hence a reductionist gospel. The reductionist gospel is seen, at least as evidenced by practice, as an "either or" to the *missio Dei*, the theology of the church being sent to join God's voice and presence in the community as God's presence is evidenced in the midst of the hurt, the harmed and the helpless there. Maybe it should be a "both/and" philosophy between these two elements of the theology of church vocation.

Subsequently when the reductionist gospel alone is seen as the aim and objective of the mission and vocation of churches which are already planted and have 'saved souls' and converts (for many years) as members, these churches can become self-centered and self-serving in their services and ceremonies, catering to the spiritual needs of the members. Such churches also seek to attract other people to join them in their self-serving rituals, observances and celebrations. In doing so they do not resemble or emulate the life and ministry of the earthly Jesus Christ as depicted in the canonical Gospel narratives. They have deviated from authentic mission, the *missio Dei*, and should return to it.

In referring to this plight missiologist Darrell Guder tells us that,

Many have argued, as I have done, that Christendom's Christianity is defined by pervasive reductionism."⁵⁸ . . . "Many Christians, as a result of the reductionist history that shapes us, understand their Christianity to mean primarily that they are "in," they are saved, they are the beneficiaries of the benefits, and they are primarily then interested that the church should help them maintain that status."⁵⁹

Guder also describes the churches (or ecclesiologies) of the reductionist gospel as those that,

⁵⁸ Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* 81

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 110

focus upon the attainment and preservation of the individualistic assurance of personal savedness, upon rites and sacraments, polities and ordered ministries, the provision of services and programs to the religious consumer, and the preservation of religious customs and celebrations valued by our secularizing culture.⁶⁰

In its tendency to reduce the gospel to individual salvation, it fails to confess the fullness of the message of the inbreaking reign of God in Jesus Christ.⁶¹

Cardinal Avery Dulles in *Models of the Church* gives us as a litmus test for a church's mission the questions, "who are the "beneficiaries that are served by the church"? and "what is the nature of the benefits bestowed by the church?"⁶² When the beneficiaries of a church's existence are its members and the benefit they receive is their own salvation and all that contributes to it, that church is not doing mission and its ministry is not missional.

All of this aptly describes the practice of ministry presently at Trinity. Only an extremely small percentage of its resources and activity go toward non-members and very little is done to affect the lives of those who do not come to the church and are in the community. It is time for Trinity to think outside the box or walls in this case, to identify with the Man from Galilee, to "do theology from below (start with the contemporary context, the present existential realities)," to be challenged to practice *missio Dei*.

J.R. Woodward feels that,

When the gospel is reduced to a private affair between us and God, it not only seems self-serving but it becomes irrelevant to the world around us and the problems we face as humanity, whether it be poverty, senseless violence, ecological disasters or the breakup of families. People who hold a reductionist

⁶⁰ Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, 124

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 24

⁶² Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1978, rev. ed. 1987) 45

version of the gospel eventually become ashamed of it, because it's not big enough to deal with the problems we face in the world.⁶³

Few people knowingly want to be a part of what is considered to be irrelevant.

The mindset and world view of people today is community, even globalism on the macro level. We are interconnected, we need each other and others need us. With only a reductionist gospel of eternal salvation of the soul, the church strips itself of real contemporary relevance and hence is a failure in not living up to its whole vocation and in lacking relevance in the here and now.

Further when the reductionist gospel is compared to the *Missio Dei* we see stark contrasts. With the *missio Dei* lives are bettered as incarnational faith is practiced and mercy and kindness and service are incarnated and the Beatitudes come alive. The Eschaton is inaugurated and the kingdom is present when acceptance and forgiveness and tolerance and community are practiced. Other examples are when immigrants are accepted and received, for instance, and drug trafficking and addiction are countered, when the strengthening of family life and marriage skills are nurtured, and authorities are lobbied to address the environmental disaster, when the church begins to speak out on social justice and other neighborhood needs are met. But the practice of the reductionist gospel uses entertainment and recording artists, beautiful facilities and advertising to attract people to come and to make the decision to secure their own eternal destiny. If we are trying to follow Jesus, *missio Dei* is the more complete expression of the way to do that.

The church in relation to God's mission is put into proper perspective by missiologist Christopher Wright, who asserts; "It is not so much the case that God has a

⁶³ J. R. Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church As Movement - Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016) 120

mission for His church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission - God's mission."⁶⁴

Professor Guder reminds us that, "to use the language of Vatican II, " the Church is missionary by its very nature."⁶⁵ ⁶⁶ In other words only until a church begins to understand who/what it is and what it does in terms of the mission of God will it begin to fulfill its calling and vocation.

⁶⁴ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, 24

⁶⁵ Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, 63

⁶⁶ Austin Flannery O.P., ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975); *Ad Gentes*, 1, 814

Chapter 3:

REDUCTIONISM AND BEYOND AT TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

...and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8 b

Trinity Lutheran Church could continue to be what it presently is but in doing so it would not be true to its authentic vocation. In order to propose ways to fulfill its authentic vocation, the *missio Dei*, as a flock of the Good Shepherd, we must first examine what its present ministry is like. Let us begin with what it is, namely a group of confessional Lutherans who gather for Worship around the Word, which pertains to personal salvation by grace through faith and the espousal of moral uprightness, and the celebration of the two Sacraments.

The Sunday Service, around which the life of this church (as do most churches) centers consists of hymn singing with musical accompaniment, the liturgy of Confession and Absolution, prayers of adoration, thanksgiving and supplication (prayers of the people), the reading of the lectionary Lessons for that Sunday from the Bible, preaching and receiving of the Sermon, viewed as God speaking to God's people and based on the Biblical texts that were read, to challenge and nurture the faith of the believers.

Additionally there is the recital of one of the ecumenical Creeds, the giving and receiving of the Offering and the celebration of the Sacraments of Holy Communion and, intermittently, Holy Baptism. The following schedule show the other weekly activities at the church aside from the Sunday Service:

Tuesday 7 pm - Bible Study
Wednesday 10 am - Sew and Sew (Sews quilts for charity)
Wednesday 7 pm - Music practice
Friday 6: 30 pm - Youth Meeting
2nd Saturday each month 2 pm - Ladies Guild Meeting
Sunday 9:15 am - Divine Worship Service
Sunday 9: 45 am - Sunday School

Figure 1 - Schedule of Weekly Activities of Trinity Lutheran Church, New Hyde Park,

In addition to these activities there are monthly visits to 'shut-in' members, periodic Confirmation classes, infant and adult Baptisms from time to time, an Annual Women Prayer Breakfast in the Fall, two annual fund raisers; a bar-b-q in the summer and a coach bus trip to the Sight and Sound Theater, and several special Services to mark the observance of the 'high' occasions on the liturgical calendar. These occur on Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Mother's and Father's Day, Christmas Eve, Harvest Thanksgiving the Sunday before the Thanksgiving holiday, New Year's Eve and a Christmas dinner and concert.

There are also weddings and funerals whenever the need for these arise. Trinity's Board of Trustees exercise supervision and administration of the church's financial and property affairs such as bill payment, repairs and maintenance of the buildings and grounds, payment of salaries, the running of the preschool and the bookkeeping and making of reports of fiscal accountability at the annual Voters Assembly.

These activities exemplify how this local church, an institution of individuals with

common beliefs (one faith, one Baptism, one Lord, Ephesians 4:5), administers the spiritual care of its members who come together for Worship and for their own edification and the nurture of their faith through the proclamation of the Gospel of grace. They (these activities, ritual and ceremonies) so engage and preoccupy this Community of the Faithful, this Fellowship of the Redeemed, this Body of Christ, that it does not interact or deliberately reach out to the wider community/society beyond its members. They do not reflect an institution that is setting out to deliberately be of service or bring hope to outsiders by attempting to intervene in the lives of the citizens of the wider society to offer to meet some need or the other.

It is to be admitted, therefore, that this list of activities depict a stewardship that renders this local church to be one that is inward focused, self-centered and self-serving. The local church should be such an integral part of its local community that, God forbid it closes, it should be missed. It should make a difference and an impact thereby being a blessing, touching lives and giving hope to people. It should, as St. Francis of Assisi said "preach the gospel and when necessary use words."

There is, in fact little resemblance in the weekly schedule and other programs, ceremonies and services of Trinity Lutheran Church to the activities of Jesus in His earthly ministries. Rather, it seems to fit the kind of reductionist church Darrell Guder warns about,

that focuses upon the attainment and preservation of the individualistic assurance of personal savedness, upon rites and sacraments, politics and ordered ministries, the provision of services and programs to the religious consumer, and the preservation of religious customs and celebrations valued by our secularizing culture.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Guder *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, 124

Yet this is much like the program of many small, active local churches. It is a tradition that is passed on from one generation to the next. These are the symptoms of the reductionist gospel consumption. Being saved is the top and often only priority. But after salvation then what? What does sanctification look like, where is love for neighbor and how is faith with works to be shown?

Aside from the individualism, the nurture of the individual's faith and the provision of the rites and services that surround that faith there is a focus on the church as an institution; its programs and facilities. These have their importance and place but when they dominate a church's focus and marginalize its interest and focus on the community around it, the church is not being true to its call; to bear witness to Christ in its context and location, its Judea and Samaria.

By the "reductionist gospel" the context doesn't matter. So long as the members are saved by grace through faith and will go to heaven when they die. It is important to note that these are fundamental to the gospel of Christ and are integral to it and are not to be down played, ignored or made light of. But neither should the existential reality and the earthly struggles of those who occupy the neighborhood around the church and who should be reached with the church's message. Wouldn't ignoring the life circumstances of the social environment be an ignoring of one's neighbor rather than loving one's neighbor? (Lev. 19: 18, Mat. 22: 39). And wouldn't it be a splitting of reality into the secular/spiritual dichotomy, a kind of Gnostic heresy which deems all things material as sinful?

For many, so long as a church is planted, kept vibrant with services and Sacraments, the spiritual/religious needs of the members are met and it is financially

solvent, it is doing well. These are important: the worshiping community, the services and programs and the physical facility. But these should not be all there is to being a witness for Christ, the only Head of the church, or the only reason for a church's existence. The reductionist gospel cuts the local church off from its context and the social realities there and from its witness, spinning an agenda of attending to spiritual needs of members only.

When He healed the man who was blind from birth, miraculously fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves and two fish (Jn 6) or delivered the Gerasene Demoniac (Mk 5) Jesus, who is God, shows us how to witness in the context, which the local church is called to do and be, in addition to its services and rites. The local church can be a voice for change but it must see its role differently. It has to deviate from the attractional church model of focusing on increasing its attendance and from its self-centered self-serving preoccupation, all of which are fueled by the reductionist gospel.

The local church, as Jesus did, has to launch out into the deep waters of the communities problems and needs. How long will the local church remain detached from its context and ignore or be indifferent to dehumanizing and disorienting threats there? How long will it preach a message of salvation of the soul, moral uprightness and eternal security alone and be complacent about such major societal problems as racism, drug addiction, social injustice, human trafficking and environmental disaster? What is required is a reorientation of the church's focus towards the community and a revamping of its self-awareness to a recognition of its own partnership with God.

Preeminently the church needs a renewal of its vision of the earthly Jesus to see the change agent and transformer that He was to Zacchaeus, Lk 19, and the woman He

met at Jacob's well, Jn 4. The church needs to catch a glimpse of the hope giver and uplifter that Jesus was to the woman with the issue of blood, Lk 8, and the man with the demon possessed boy, Mk 9. Indeed it's important for the church to recognize that in Jesus the buyers and the sellers in the Jerusalem temple, Mt 21, and the woman caught in adultery, Jn 8, encountered an interventionist and a disruptor. For the theological foundation for this new wave a church has to revisit its Christology (doctrine of the person and work of Christ) especially the aspect of the two natures of Christ and in turn His humanity. This Christological journey should begin with an acknowledgment of the importance of the historical Jesus as the archetype for the vocation of the church namely its mission and the *missio Dei*.

In a real sense, and contrary to many common notions Jesus was a community activist and a social reformer. As a church, then, we must rethink what it means to follow Jesus, how we can follow Him in the community. One of the ways in which Trinity Lutheran Church can become involved in the community around it is by embracing the social implications of the gospel of Christ. Let us begin a quest to understand what this means by recognizing the basics, namely that humankind are social beings who live together and interact in communities.

Our lives and actions affect each other, in towns and states and countries and the globe, in workplaces and marketplaces. Secondly there is a scarcity of various benefits within our groups. Thirdly there are moral, ethnic, cultural, power and gender diversity within our groups. Because of all of these factors living together in our communities, becomes conflicting, contentious and inequitable and many do not get their due resulting in situations of unfairness and mistreatment in the social context. The social implications

of the gospel is derived from Jesus' command to, "Love one another," Jn. 13:34, and to treat one another fairly and to give people their due, which is a matter of justice.

Ronald Nash defines justice by saying, a person "is just if he treats other people fairly, if he does not grasp after more than he is due."⁶⁸ He went on to say with reference to classical philosophers like Aristotle that, "The ancients believed that justice always involves giving a person his due, that to which he has a right."⁶⁹ Building on the above the editor of *Christian Faith and Social Justice, Five Views*, Vic McCracken, defines social justice for us as,

If justice is about giving each person his or her due, social justice is simply about how *communities* give people their due. . . Social justice is also about how communities ensure that all members are able to experience the benefits of our life together, and how communities rightly distribute the goods, burdens, and risks of that life.⁷⁰

There are many approaches to social justice and it is not the intention of this project to explore them but I take the virtue ethics approach. By this approach acting justly in our day-to-day dealings with one another is seen as a virtue rather than a duty (deontological) or as a means to an end (consequential). "A virtue approach says. . . that justice is about the kinds of relationships we are created to have with one another, and thus the sorts of people we are meant to be."⁷¹

The Bible is replete with calls for justice. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8, (NRSV). "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," Amos 5:24, (NRSV). "Religion

⁶⁸ Ronald Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2002) 30

⁶⁹ Ibid 28

⁷⁰ Vic McCracken, ed. *Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) 3

⁷¹ Ibid, 141

that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world " James 1: 27, (NRSV).

Clearly embracing social justice is integral to *missio Dei*. In order to transition to becoming a missional church, therefore, Trinity Lutheran Church, should corporately and individually, seek to grow in the awareness, advocacy and activity of social justice.

As is to be expected some social justice issues are universal and some are particularly local. Also some issues that pertain to the welfare and wellbeing of members of the community may not fit into the social justice parameters. Since New Hyde Park is a "middle income" residential community issues of poverty, homelessness, hunger, underdevelopment etc. are not apparent in the immediate neighborhood. These needs, however, can be served in other communities and even abroad. One set of issues that are relevant here, though, is that of racism, prejudice and discrimination. The church can work on raising awareness of pluralism, diversity and tolerance and acceptance of others of difference since a previously almost totally white community is now, in demographic terms, becoming more and more South East Asian.

One thing that Trinity can do as a community service is to avail its large hall/gym for exercise during the cold months through a walking program since its indoor spaces are reasonably warm. There are many who are compelled to exercise year round for health reasons but are prevented from doing so during the winter months. Also an undertaking can be made to serve the senior population through collaboration with the Parker Institute of New Hyde Park.

Self-care is also a very important aspect of life that is often neglected and hence can be advocated by my church. For instance according to the CDC website heart disease

is America's number one killer, that is symptomatic in many phases and forms such as hypertension, high cholesterol, stroke and heart attack. Yet these diseases can be largely reduced or even avoided with proper dieting. By working with health professionals heart disease awareness and improved dietary habits can be raised through seminars, webinars, social media posts and even blogs. Another self-care program which can be implemented, in partnership with a counseling center such the Lutheran Counseling Center, is one with focus on "improving your interpersonal relationship skills" to help to improve marriage and family life. There is always a need for this, irrespective of the neighborhood.

Christianity is heavily based on faith in God as Creator, as most Creeds such as the Apostle's and Nicene say in their first article and the Bible in its first verse. Yet destruction of the Creator's creation, by such means as pollution of rivers, carbon emission, which leads to global warming and climate change, too much plastic (which is not biodegradable) in the environment and habitat destruction through deforestation for development, is widespread. It is now a catastrophe that threatens the safety of future generations and the very continued existence of many species.

The stewardship of the environment is left largely to non-spiritual environmental organizations like Greenpeace, Wildlife Conservation Society and The Nature Conservancy. It's imperative that the church's voice is heard in the lobby for awareness and action for care of the world's common home. Awareness and advocacy concerning ecological disaster is another unconventional way that Trinity Lutheran Church can join God in service in and to the community. These could also include ministry to seniors, ministry to the mentally ill, and participation in international observances such as Earth Day on April 22, International Women's Day, March 8, Mental Health awareness month

in May, and Mental Illness Awareness Week, the first week in October. In the very recent past Trinity Lutheran Church has been involved in honoring veterans, marching in the Memorial Day parade and hosting a culture and diversity dinner and stage show in Kruger Hall.

A dominance of reductionism of the gospel message has held Trinity, yet we must awaken. The reductionist gospel is not to be abandoned. But to it has to be added the emulation of Jesus in His service to the community, *diakonia*, and following *missio Dei* theology is the way to do that. As a community of some or semi-affluence New Hyde Park would have to be studied by Trinity to identify other ways in which God is active here in order to join in to serve.

But old habits die hard and Trinity has been accustomed to the internally focused reductionism for so long that change may be resisted and slow. But this project equips me to lead the way in recognition that Jesus, the Messiah, was the Servant who calls us to serve with Him and for Him. "And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim to them?" Romans 10: 14b, (NRSV). The heart of this project is the missional proclamation to turn the hearts of the members of Trinity to see the Savior we are called to witness to as Servant calling us to service.

Chapter 4

THE SEVEN SERMON SERIES

(i) The Importance Of Preaching

Preaching is not taken lightly in Protestant churches. Every minister is required to be specially trained in homiletics or the art of preaching. This involves such necessary skills as hermeneutics/exegesis or the interpretation of Holy Scripture, the application of the interpretation to everyday life and the art of sermon delivery. Further a preacher is ordained or specially set aside to the office of Word and Sacrament. The importance of these are that the proper proclamation (preaching) of the Word and administration of the Sacraments define the true Church.

The Church's proclamation is derived from its ecclesiology, its self-understanding. The Church is the Body of Christ, the believers in Christ. As such it is God's covenantal people of faith gathered around the Word and Sacrament for worship, service, fellowship and discipleship. The Church is the flock of the Good Shepherd and the fellowship of the redeemed, because it is redeemed by the Son. It is also the fellowship of the Spirit, because it is called, empowered and led by the Spirit. But, as this project contends, it is the goal of the Church, its mission, its vocation, that needs revisiting and clarification. It is commonly considered to be soul winning and church planting via the proclamation of the good news of salvation, or 'spreading' the Word.

The Church is often perceived as a recruiter for heaven, by calling people to faith and righteousness through its proclamation. But this is a narrow view of the Church's vocation since in fact Christ's purpose is, "to prepare God's people for works of service," Ephesians 4:12a, "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good

works," Ephesians 10a. Therefore this project makes the point that the Church's self understanding and proclamation should be broadened to include its role of service in the world, the community around the local church, as "salt and light". The local church fulfills that role not on its own but by participating in God's mission, the *missio Dei*. This should be the understanding of Word around which it gathers. Barth clarifies the Word as proclamation /preaching for us.

There is the living Word, Jesus Christ himself, the bearer and the fullness of the Christian revelation; then there is the written word, the Bible, which witnesses to the living Word; and finally there is the proclaimed word, the living voice of the Church as, in its preaching and teaching, it too witnesses do the living Word by interpreting and applying the written word. The living Word, or incarnate Lord, has priority and gives birth to the other two forms of the word; but it is only through the mediation of the written word and the proclaimed word that we have access to Christ, the revealed word.⁷²

So the true church is defined by right preaching and the proclamation gives access to Christ and preaching is the interpreting and applying the written word. And through preaching, as in a series of seven sermons this project gives the members of Trinity Lutheran Church access to Christ, the Living Word, as the missional example.

Preaching is central in the life of the church. Calvinists refer to it as the Centrality of the Word. For Lutherans it is a means of grace by which faith is received, Romans 10:17. It is what the church gathers around on Sunday and is the Pastor's most important work. It feeds the church, holds the church and leads the church by showing the church Christ's love and calls the members to a faithful life of service. Based on the above we can posit that:

⁷² John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1966) p 403

Preaching is the Church's proclamation of Christ the living Word (the substance of preaching), for the calling to faith and the nurturing of the faith of the Church (the purpose of preaching), through interpretation and application of the written Word (the method of preaching), for the righteousness and faithful service of the Church in the real world (the goal of preaching).

Figure 2.

Preaching is therefore a vital vehicle in calling the church to a missional understanding.

(ii) Missional Preaching

The missional hermeneutics is based on the essentials of *missio Dei*, namely that mission is God's activity in the world, redeeming and restoring God's creation through Christ. In the earthly Jesus, God incarnated in the Son, we behold God active in love, grace and compassion as the Gospels give witness to the life of Jesus, Heb. 1:3, Col. 2:9. Therefore Jesus is mission; by His healing, accepting, delivering and giving hope, which the redeemed are sent to pattern or incarnate, evidencing the kingdom. Thus missional preaching is preaching Christ.

Each time a Pastor preaches is an opportunity for that Pastor to be the scholar and missional theologian who shifts the paradigm of that church's vision of mission and vocation from soul saver solely to include participating in God's mission for the world. The Sermon is the readily available and vital opportunity to initiate the transition to missional ministry in any church since it is what the church gathers around. Every Sunday can be seen as an already-arranged missional seminar.

The salient theology is that to be missional is to act on the belief that God's

mission is to bring all of creation to the knowledge of God's love and grace and that God sends each of us as individuals and corporately as a church into the world as God's agents of that love and grace. In *Reading the Bible Missionally* Michael Goheen reminds us about the corporate objective of preaching. He wrote,

But preaching is not about proclaiming salvation to individuals bound together merely by their common interest to be nurtured in faith. Preaching is about forming a distinctive community to play its role in God's purpose. As the community is built up by the preaching of the word, individual Christians will in turn be nurtured in their faith.⁷³

The life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth portrayed and exemplified what it means to be missional by reaching out and giving to others. This is the sense in which church authenticity is interpreted in this thesis - as being missional as portrayed and exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth and as documented by the four Evangelists in their Gospels. To be missional is to be the authentic church and to be the authentic church is to be missional.

The authentic church today must not only have stirring and inspiring Worship Services but must also be proactive in community activities of service, enhancement and empowerment. This means that to be missional church members will have to become inspired to serve. A call to become missional is a call to introspection and a call to realign spiritual values. It is a call to shift commitment and focus from inside the church and to the saints within, to outside the church, to the sinners without, so to speak. In the church we receive in abundance; God's love and grace and mercy and forgiveness and salvation and hope and so on. But giving it back, becoming a channel of it is what requires transition and time and patience. But faith comes from hearing the message,

⁷³ Michael W. Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 249

(Romans 10: 17a).

The church that is missional will be a church whose concern goes beyond its own internal affairs. It will have inspiring Worship Services where "the Gospel is preached in its purity and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession VII 1), proper management of its fiscal and property matters, and empathetic pastoral care and nurture of its members. But the burden of the church that seeks to be missional is to carry out the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God, which takes more than to "proclaim the good news of Your salvation so that all who hear it may receive the gift of salvation,"⁷⁴ Through missional preaching the members need to learn how Jesus was present when He was needed, how He broke the norm by accepting people He was not supposed to accept, dined with sinners and tax collectors and stood up for justice.

(iii) The Missional Preaching Occasion

The aim of this project is to initiate a process of change, transition and transformation of Trinity Lutheran Church into a missional church as a new direction and way forward. The method of doing this is a series of seven sermons, which proclaim Christ as the missional example for the church to follow. We now turn our minds to the manuscripts of these missional sermons, which I did not preach verbatim since I am an extemporaneous preacher.

I have been thrilled to discover *missio Dei* theology and its practical application in the form of the missional church, in this project thus far. It is theologically and biblically compelling and appealing but I also recognize that it really is a radical transformation and a lot to ask of folks whose present perspective on what the church is about has been

⁷⁴ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006) 305

ingrained for years, even decades. Because it is easier said than done I knew I must exercise patience and understanding as a pastor leading the people of God through such a transition. As such my approach has been to come to a clear and concrete understanding of the missional church for myself, as the one leading this transition, which this project did for me. Then also to teach the congregation about *missio Dei* and missional church carefully and gently so as not to turn anyone off.

I, therefore, chose not to preach these missional sermons consecutively. I think this would be too intensive. I preached these sermons on the third Sunday of every month starting in October 2019 to November 2019 and breaking in December for Advent. I resumed in January to March 2020 and broke again for the pandemic shut-down which was from the latter half of March to the first half of June. I resumed again in July and August. I did not speak to the congregation outside of the sermons about *missio Dei* or the becoming a missional church such as at the beginning of the series to introduce it. This I believe is the point and purpose of the sermons and the sermons do this best.

I organized a discussion forum/ meeting as I was approaching the date of the fourth sermon. My thought was that the members would have heard enough to have thoughts of their own on the subject to discuss it. However the pandemic lock-down came after the first one.

Sermon 1.

Title - The Mission Motive - Gratitude - Healing of the Ten Lepers, Luke 17: 11- 19

Introduction

How often haven't we been told that when the chips are down we are to fight back? That when the going gets tough the tough gets going, and don't give up the fight, don't accept the plight? But maybe you'll agree with me that it's easier said than done because it takes courage and grit and perseverance to fight back. That is why the refusal of the ten lepers whom Jesus healed to accept their plight of the dreadful skin disease, leprosy, deserve our admiration. It was that refusal that made them so determined in their cry to Jesus for healing.

They refused to accept an existence of isolation, humiliation and degradation which their society had condemned them to because of circumstances beyond their control. Is their story yours? For when we are in the zone of doom, in a condition of crisis, we too can cry out to God for deliverance. But we must first refuse to settle, and believe there is more in store. God is a rewarder of those who seek Him, Heb. 11: 6. God is able to do exceeding abundantly more than we can think or ask, Eph. 3:20. So cry aloud the Kyrie, "Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy."

God in the Midst

These ten lepers were desperate for liberation from their plight of pain, their condition of shame and their loss of community brought on by their disease. They had to live in caves away from the rest of society and shout, "leper, leper," to warn anyone of their approach because the disease was thought to be dreadfully contagious. Who in their midst would hear the cry of these citizens in crisis? Who would take the time to care, to rescue them from this oppressive existence? Who?

Jesus came along! He was on a mission, a rescue mission, God's mission. He did not avoid them or move away from them like the rest of society. On the contrary He

moved toward them, to be in their midst. He wanted them to see God's love. He wanted them to feel accepted, not left out, because God loves them and has a plan of blessing for them. It is God's mission, the *missio Dei*, to heal the broken-hearted and lift up the fallen.

If we are to truly follow Jesus, we must join the Lord in the midst of the broken, the hurting and the left out in our midst. To do so is called being a missional church. We have to be like Jesus and join God in a movement toward the citizens in our society who are in crisis to bring them hope and restoration. Our Lord healed these lepers when he heard their cry. And He sent them to the temple to have their healing verified by the priests there.

Ingrates

It is amazing how a cry in a condition of crisis can go from rescue to restoration by God, and then to rebellion against God. Nine of the ten lepers who were healed took off after their healing, perhaps to enjoy and relish their new state of health and wholeness, their blessing. But they spared no thought for the Giver of their gift. This ingratitude and thanklessness is itself rebellion to God Who gives hope and wholeness.

Thanksgiving to God for all God's grace, mercy, blessings and love is just as noble and admirable an act as the courage to refuse to settle. It issues from the great virtue of gratitude which evidently missed the nine lepers who refused to return to give thanks. Did it miss you too? The motive and the inspiration to move towards the cry of those in crisis is the gratitude we ourselves feel for the rescue and restoration we receive each and every day by way of awakening in the mornings, and having health and strength, daily bread, deliverance from evil, forgiveness of sins and the list goes on.

They were self-centered and self-absorbed. Simply put they were ungrateful!

They not only refused to accept their prior plight but they also now refused to accept their indebtedness to their Savior and Deliverer. If this were a random sampling of society then it means that 90 % of us receive the bounties of God without sufficiently showing our gratitude and appreciation by glorifying Him for His great grace and goodness. The call to be a missional church, is a call to get rid of being self-centered and ungrateful.

The Sweet Fragrance of Gratitude

Isn't it a joy to see that one was grateful for his physical transformation, and the emotional, social and economic renewal that would follow? He distinguished himself from the others by going back to Jesus and bowing at His feet in thanksgiving and worship. In him we see gratitude as the motivation for worship and thanksgiving and praise to God for all His blessings. This one leper or 10 % of the recipients of blessings carry the sweet fragrance of gratitude. He is our hero and example to follow because he recognized that he is blessed greatly and favored highly. We must be that ten percent.

In this one grateful, healed leper we see the motivation to be missional, to be in our community to be of service. Missional behavior begins with gratitude. We can become a missional church but only if we are so grateful to God for His blessings of grace and salvation and hope that it motivates us to join God's mission of healing and restoration of others.

Jesus was pleased with the grateful former leper but also disappointed with the unappreciative nine that He asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" Luke 17:17, (NRSV). It is always a haunting question to ask, "where do we fit in"? With the grateful one or with the ungrateful nine? For his gratitude, Jesus sent the grateful one on his way, on the mission of telling others about his healing and of the love

of his Healer. "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well," Luke 17: 19, (NRSV). Mission means "sent," and in sending the grateful former leper to share the good news of his own healing and of the Healer's love for him, Jesus enlisted him in mission.

Conclusion

The mission of the church is to be involved in the mission of God (the *missio Dei*) and the mission of God is to share God's love and friendship and acceptance with the world. Ten were accepted and loved and healed but one was sent on mission. Because he showed gratitude! Gratitude is the distinguishing characteristic of the church on mission, the missional church, and has to be the motivating force for our church's missional transformation.

Sermon 2

Title: The Missional Approach.

Base on The Woman at the Well, John 4: 1- 15

When last have you had a lucky day, a day to remember, a day that changed your life from routine and monotony to hope and happiness? Don't we all long for our lucky day? One day, just like any other day, a Samaritan woman went, as she always did, to the village well to draw water for her household use. Little did she know that it would be her lucky day.

A Jewish man approached her at the well and spoke to her. But Jewish men do not speak to women in public and Jews do not speak to Samaritans at all. And he asked her

for a drink! She could not believe it! That He would lower Himself and defy His culture to ask her for a drink. Unable to contain her shock she burst out, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" Jesus shocked her! We are followers of this Shocker but we don't shock the world. How come we don't approach people of difference in unexpectedly caring ways that surprise them?

She was shocked that Jesus approached her across the divide of race and religion! In that encounter he refused to overlook her but placed value and importance on her. He was conveying to her that she was worth his time and effort and attention. So hers was a pleasant surprise. I wonder what struggle she was going through before coming to the well? Because now the Jewish Messiah is warming her heart and setting her at ease. We too can reach out to people of difference, in their struggles, with understanding. To do so is to be like Jesus, to be on the mission of God, the *missio Dei* and to be missional.

As her lucky day encounter unfolded Jesus our Redeemer dialogued with her about who He is and offered her living water and eternal life. But hers was a life of giving much and getting little. It was the first time she was on the receiving end. She was accustomed to being rejected, having had five husbands. But now she is being accepted. He made her feel respected and loved. Our God is an accepting God, friends. Our God is a giving God. Our God gives us strength and hope and peace and forgiveness and grace and faith. To be missional is to show others our God through our lives of acceptance.

John, the Gospel writer, does not name this Samaritan woman whom Jesus approached at Jacobs well and accepted for who she is, contrary to the norms of His culture and religion. But she left us an example of the response of someone who encounters the living God. It was that of awe. Her life was changed. She has a new

purpose now. So she abandoned her water jar and ran to call others to see Christ. What a lucky day, when she was approached, accepted and filled with awe. When we approach people of difference and show them acceptance and the light of Christ in us they will be filled with awe and God's mission would be fulfilled and we would have been missional.

Sermon 3.

Title: Missional Reorientation, Based: Matthew 9: 9-13 Dinner With Tax Collectors

Introduction

In many instances we tend to profile or pre-judge someone's character based on the outward traits they are known to possess such as their complexion, neighborhood of origin or their profession. Matthew was often a victim of that evil, being a tax collector. Until he met Jesus, the norm breaker! In Jesus' day the tax collector was despised and considered a thief and a collaborator with the Roman oppressors. But that did not stop Jesus from calling Matthew (Levi) to be his disciple.

Equal Chance

Jesus sees the unique individual in each of us, as He did in tax collecting Matthew. In doing so He has set a pattern for us, not to profile or prejudge those we come into contact with. In the kingdom of God, which Jesus inaugurated through His earthly ministry, God's love for all is equal, and there is equal acceptance for all. The life and ministry of Jesus is the prototype of the ministry of a missional church. The missional church has to engage those who are not traditionally within the church circle, as Jesus

engaged the despised tax collectors, rather than profile or pass judgment on them.

It is a stain on society that there are often an ample supply of those who make it their duty to point out shortcomings in others. The self righteous Jewish sect, the Pharisees, were always on the ball where this is concerned. When Jesus showed up later for a dinner party at Matthew's house, his friends were there; tax collectors and other 'questionables'. The self righteous Pharisees were quick to castigate Jesus, who is the righteous Son of God, for not knowing better than to hang out with such likes. But Jesus teaches us that to be missional is to know that we are sent to share love and acceptance equally to those who are the outcasts, the marginalized and the ostracized as to others. We are the church and the church is the missionary that God sends on God's mission.

Reorientation for Missional

This is the mission of God, to reconcile such as these. It is not customary for the church to go outside of its confines and interact with those outside of its kind. The call to be missional, then, would be a norm breaker for the church. It requires a reorientation of the church's understanding of who it is sent to minister to. It demands that we go beyond our comfort zones and do what we are not accustomed to, to realign the values and practices of the church. As church members we cannot and should not presume to know the mandate of the church without looking at the life of Christ, the Lord of the church. He declared to His critics, "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners," Matthew 9:13, (NRSV)

Conclusion

The mandate of the church is the same, to be the incarnation of grace and hope and charity to sinners. This is going to mean a whole new perspective on what programs and activities we plan and engage in as a church. The Pharisees within will criticize and object but we must follow Him, Who first showed us love and showed us acceptance, if we are to show love and acceptance equally and not profile any one.

Sermon 4.

Title: The Church in the Community Base Text: John 2: 1-11, Jesus Changes Water into Wine

Introduction

Many Christians have a dualistic view of reality. They think that there are two realms; the secular and the spiritual and that the two should not be mixed. According to this view the goal and aim of faith is securing eternal salvation and the question of importance is, "where will you spend eternity?" The realm of civil society, social issues, political affairs, culture and matters of development are secular and should not be brought into the church or the institutional church taken out into the midst of secular society and its activities. This paradigm suits the agenda of many but Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and spiritual Head, shows us differently.

Ministry of Presence

In the first of the seven signs around which John the Evangelist wrote his Gospel Jesus was at a wedding to which He and His disciples were invited. There He was, the

Messiah, God incarnate, the Holy One of Israel, at a village celebration, in the midst of the community. And I suppose He had a dance or two, as we all would at a wedding! He was not telling anyone about God's love or about their salvation. No one was showing great faith or believing in Him Who saves. He was just present, in the midst, involved, participating, lending credence to what was going on and perhaps sharing the joy of the moment.

But is the church, of which Christ is the only King and Head, in the community around it and the civic affairs thereof? By the current paradigm our church is dissociated and disconnected from its community. It is not present at town events like Memorial Day parades nor is it speaking up on matters that affect citizens like the opioid crisis, mental illness, or the problem of illegal immigration. The missional church is on the mission of God, the *missio Dei*. And if God is present, His church that is on His mission must be present too, to see what God is doing so that it can join in.

Wake Up Call

Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren explain that, "Being missional means we join the heritage, entering a journey without any road maps to discover what God is up to in our neighborhoods and communities."⁷⁵ But many in the church have become complacent, being content with attending church a few times a month and returning to busy lives during the week. Returning to *missio Dei* or the mission of God, is to realize that we are sent, not only as individuals but also as the institutional church, into the community. It is a wakeup call to be the church militant once more. It is to shift the paradigm to a reality in which both secular and spiritual are a part of one whole.

⁷⁵ Alan Roxburgh, Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009) 15

When they eventually ran out of wine at the wedding Jesus performed His first of the seven miracles recorded by John. What if Jesus was absent???? Jesus saved the groom, not from eternal damnation but earthly embarrassment. There are many who suffer alone because the church is absent. Many of society's ill go unchecked because no one, the church included, cares. In a real sense evil prospers because the church is withdrawn from the culture.

Conclusion

To truly be whom Christ has sent us to be friends, is to be missional. But to be missional we have to evaluate our understanding of the role of the church in relation to the secular realm, the culture and the community, and our role in the church. To be missional is to be willing to follow our Savior in a ministry of presence in our neighborhood. This is where and how our faith is put into action.

Sermon 5.

Title: Justice and the Good Church, Base Text: John 8: 1-11, The Woman Caught in Adultery

Introduction

Hope is a virtue you need when you're in trouble. And boy, was she in trouble? Her sins had finally caught up with her. She was caught in the act.....adultery. According to their Law the punishment for such transgressors is death by stoning and those who caught her were about to let her have the full extent of the Law. They were hateful,

judgmental and vicious. They were about to carry out her sentence by consensus and had picked up stones and rocks of all sizes to hurl at her. But does she deserve to die? By whose standards? Is there no one who would raise their voice on her behalf?

She must have been absolutely terrified, fearing for her life and enveloped with hopelessness! If only there was someone who would raise their voice on her behalf. Her plight is representative of the plight of many in society who are bullied and traumatized and discriminated against by powers that be over them. While we can wonder who would be a voice for the vulnerable and downtrodden let us bear in mind that the church is a voice! A prophetic voice. Prophetic because it can speak for God. Whether the church's prophetic voice is silent or audible is another matter.

Where is our church in this scene? What is its role in society with regards to issues of justice and ethics? Silence, passing judgment or calling for mercy? Tough and perhaps unfamiliar questions.

Mercy Embodied

Many would describe a good church as one with good music, good preaching, good facilities, good friendly people, good coffee hour, good financial situation and so on. But where is Jesus in the good church? After all He is its Lord and Head and the One in Whom the church believes as God incarnate. His earthly life of perfection was qualification for Him to die as a redemption ransom and the reason for forgiveness of sins. This adulterous woman was dragged to Him for a verdict. And it was not condemnation!

Not only was Jesus the incarnation, or the coming in human flesh, of the one true Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, but in that moment He was also the

incarnation, or the enfleshment of the virtues of mercy and hope and justice, all that the condemned women needed. When He challenged the accusers to throw the first stone if they had no sin He was standing up for the oppressed.

Courage to Stand

He was courageously challenging the structures of evil at that time and place. He was in the community making His voice heard. This is God and the one sent by God at the same time and this is what He is doing. This is the *missio Dei*, the mission of God and since the church's mission is to do the mission of God then it has to be the church's mission to do what Jesus did in this case; challenge the structures of evil, stand up for the oppressed and be the incarnation of mercy, hope and justice; the embodiment of these virtues in human flesh. This is what it means to be a good church, a missional church; to do what Jesus did.

The woman's accusers all departed, prompted by the guilt of their own sins. And Jesus assured her that neither did He condemn her. So He sent her away free from condemnation and free to be what she was meant to be; because Jesus raised His voice in her support. Our Lord also implored her to sin no more. He did not condemn the sinner but He did not condone the sins either. God is a forgiver of the sins of the contrite (Ps 130: 4, Ps 51: 17). We are to stand with God in the neighborhood.

Conclusion

Missional ministry sends the church to have the courage to wear a new hat by engaging in the justice and ethics issues of the day. These include the opioid epidemic, human trafficking, domestic violence and the harassment of black youths by the police.

Being missional sends the church beyond its comfort zone of proclaiming the grace and mercy of God to the righteous in the worship setting, Romans 8:1, to becoming the incarnation of that grace and mercy in the real world of sinners.

Sermon 6.

Title: Missional Traits - based on the Sending of Abram, Genesis 12: 1-9

Introduction

Abram (Abraham) deserves our admiration and respect for leaving family, home and country to embark on a journey of an unknown destination. But why did he go? Why did Abram pack up and go to where God was sending him? You see this is the nature of God. God is a sending God, a missionary God. God sent Moses down to Egypt to bring God's people out of bondage, God sent Isaiah to preach to the Jews in Jerusalem and God sent Jonah to Nineveh to call the Assyrians to repentance.

God the Father sent the only begotten Son to become incarnate in our world to be our Savior. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to renew the church and the Triune God sends the church into the world to incarnate love, hope and peace. As we begin to reorient our understanding of the church towards the notion of being sent into the world and as we begin to think of becoming a missional people we should answer this same question for ourselves - why should we go?

Embracing Unfamiliar Realities.

Lets bear in mind that God made huge promises to Abram; to bless him and make his name great and make a great nation out of him. Is this why he went, for the benefits and personal rewards? We might never know, but the human nature can compromise our judgment. There are many who have done good for selfish reasons. Could that be Abram? Regardless of the reason he went, he gives us a portrait of what it means to be missional namely to go where God is sending. It meant going beyond his comfort zone. It meant leaving the familiar behind. It meant venturing out into the unknown. It meant **embracing unfamiliar realities**. It meant change and transition. If we are ready to follow the *missio Dei* we must get ready to go with God into new and unfamiliar places, to get ready to serve God in new and unfamiliar ways. This is the first missional trait we see in Abram.

Willingness to Bless

Maybe the real reason Abram went to where God was sending him was because what God promised is what he was looking for all along namely that through him all the nations would be blessed. There are those who look at the world and long for it to change. They see grave ills ravaging society. They see economic exploitation, poverty and addiction, they see oppression, war and destruction of the environment. Some of these wish it could be different. Some of them set out to make it different while some submit themselves to God, who makes all things new, Rev. 20:15, to become God's instruments to make that difference. Maybe Abram's reason for going was to be that instrument for God's blessings. Not only was he embracing the unfamiliar but the second missional trait that we see in Abram was **the willingness to be an instrument of blessing**.

Trust In God

Perhaps Abram was a man of great emotional and psychological strength which would sustain him through the pain and trauma of uprooting and separation from family, home and country. And perhaps he was a man of altruistic motives and hence was happy to be an instrument of God's blessings. But what about facing the unknown along the way? What if there would be danger and what if harm comes to him or his family? Perhaps the real reason for his going into the unknown into which God was sending him was because he was a man of great faith and trust in God. After all it is for his great faith that he became renowned for Holy Scripture. Maybe he was **trusting totally in God** to protect and deliver him from the unknown perils that may lie ahead. He exemplifies the deep faith that is a criterion for those who will join God in what God is doing in their community and neighborhood.

Conclusion

The *missio Dei* concept makes us understand that mission is not what the church does but what God is doing. The church does not have a mission, but God has a mission, and God has a church for God's mission. So to embark on God's mission is to venture out into the unknown to become an instrument of blessings outside of the familiar confines of the church, with the understanding that there will be risks and hazards but we can trust God in Christ Jesus. This is what we are being urged to sign up for as a gratefully redeemed people of the Most High God.

Sermon 7

Title: A Priority for Mission, based on the Good Samaritan, Luke 10: 25-37

Introduction:

It is amazing what we can learn about the priorities of different individuals when we compare them. The parable of the Good Samaritan gives us such a revealing comparison of three very different men. These three men all encountered the same situation, namely a victim of robbery left half dead by the side of the Jericho road on which they were also traveling. The victim desperately needed someone's sympathy and assistance to get the medical care that would save his life.

Avoidance Syndrome

Two, who were a priest and a Levite respectively, hurried along on the other side of the road to avoid the wounded man. Maybe they had to perform rituals and ceremonies they were responsible for at the Jerusalem Temple. Perhaps there were worshippers waiting on them. For whatever reason a mission of mercy was not their top priority just then. Stopping by the side of the road to save a life would delay them. They could not give such a diversion a higher priority than "serving the Lord" in the Lord's house.

Human pain and suffering can become mundane, and relegated to the bottom of our list of priorities and hence avoided. But Jesus, the Savior, told this parable, precisely to illustrate that that is the incorrect mindset, worldview and recognition of one's place in society. *We are* in fact our brother's keeper, "his welfare is my concern," (*He Ain't Heavy* by Hollies) no one is an island, we all need each other, we are all interconnected and we must not avoid the pain of the hurt, the harmed and the helpless.

Diakonia

By His own life our Lord exemplified the life of concern for others; He healed the sick, befriended the outcasts and even challenged the establishment that exploited the vulnerable. Jesus' concern was not just theoretical but it became tangible in service or *diakonia*, (Greek for service). Our mission, as individuals and as a church is to show faith active in service. This is missional, to empower and liberate those in need, pain and want in the community as Jesus did, and as the parabolic Good Samaritan did. The proclamation of the gospel of eternal salvation is only a part of the God's mission, in which the missional church participates. God's mission also includes compassion and service for the broken and bruised, in which the missional church also participates.

We can serve the Lord outside of the Lord's house and other than on the Lord's day by getting involved in today's health issues. For instance Long Island has an opioid addiction problem, heart disease kills 650,000 and cancer 600,00 persons annually in the USA (www.MDLinx.com), many suffer silently from mental health issues like stress, anxiety and depression and in an aging population many struggle with issues of fear of becoming elderly or how to care for the elderly.

Could the local church perhaps host "Have a Healthy Heart!" information campaign, panel discussions on avoiding opioid addiction, organize events to raise awareness of mental health/illness during Mental Health month in May with NAMI and collaborate with relevant institutions on elder care education and support? Hey, the church can play a role, a vital role, and take its rightful place in a society that needs it. This is one way in which we could transition to missional, by showing concern, giving priority to and shifting focus onto out-of-church and into-the-community issues?

Got Mercy?

Lets return to the third individual, shall we? He was ethnically and culturally different, being a Samaritan, and despised. Yet he stopped to help the sufferer, to serve him or perform *diakonia*. Why would his priority be different from the other two, offering service, which flows from mercy, to a dying man? Why did he risk his own life in the process, and his time and resources also to lift the fallen? Why did he feel such compassion for a wounded stranger who was different from himself? Was it because he was raised differently? I believe it was because of the way he saw himself; as someone who has a responsibility to those who are helpless and downtrodden. Maybe he has been there himself, wounded and longing for sympathy and help himself.

Maybe he's a "wounded healer" who, having been wounded and dehumanized himself, is able to identify with the present wounded and is thus able to exercise compassion and render assistance. This is a missional principle; that the reason we want to join the Lord in the Lord's healing and liberating and renewing mission in the world should be because we ourselves were healed and liberated and renewed and now, hallelujah, praise the Lord, we are happy to give back. Freely receive, freely give.

Missional

What a great blessing this Good Samaritan was to the half dead robbery victim. What a difference he made in that man's welfare. He bound up his wounds to stop the bleeding, put him on his donkey and took him to an inn to get medical treatment and paid for it. This is service! Service makes the church's mission holistic when it is added to the proclamation of the good news of salvation and the prophetic voice of advocacy for justice. The missional church makes a difference in the community in which it is located when it makes the community and the ills and needs there a top priority. This is the

litmus test for the missional nature of a local church; if it dies will the community miss it? Only the members will miss the self-serving church.

God was active in bringing dignity to this dehumanized individual on that Jericho road and the Good Samaritan joined the Lord. He became God's instrument and agent of healing. God similarly calls us from whatever is presently holding our focus. God is sending us into the community to be his change agents for the robbed and victimized. God is not distant and dormant. On the contrary God is present and active. God has an agenda to give power to the defenseless, heal the broken hearted and strengthen the weary.

Conclusion

Every local church, including ours, has an opportunity to be relevant and be an instrument of blessing and hope in its context and community. But to do so it will have to change course and join the Lord in what the Lord is doing there, or it can be the priest and Levite and hurry along, indifferent, self absorbed and callus to the realities around it. Not only is the choice ours to make but the impact as well.

(iv) Response

The response to these sermons was disappointing. I believe the theology and application and delivery were good but the reaction of the congregation was the same as on any other Sunday; there was very little feedback by way of their thoughts on what they heard. But I suspect that a reason for the poor response is this. In my preaching career I have found congregants to warm up to sermons of rebuke about sins, that call them to

turn back to God, sermons of reassurance for troubled times and sermons about the abundant blessings in store for them. I have found however that congregants do not respond well to sermons that challenge them to go and do likewise, which the above missional sermons are.

The pandemic did not help too. As things were heating up the lock down came and things have not been the same since. These sermons initiate the transition. They must now be followed up by other pedagogical methods like group discussions, repetition of the sermons, study groups, poster campaigns on the walls of the church facilities, planning sessions and so on.

Their response also tells me something about the general mindset of my congregation which should inform my approach to further planning of the transition process. On my part writing and delivering these missional sermons were a highlight of my preaching career.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This project is not only a critique of the way church is done at Trinity Lutheran Church in New Hyde Park, NY, and possibly in numerous other local churches, but it also offers an alternative, namely the inclusion of the *missio Dei*, as well as a method for transition. It has been a journey of discovery in missiology for me and a realization that mission is not a department in the church nor in practical theology but that it is rather about what the church and its vocation are all about.

It is by no means a condemnation of present practices of proclamation of salvation for personal faith and emphasis on the activities within the church for its members and those who attend. On the contrary it is a call to broaden and build on that reductionism by including *diakonia*, or service to the 'unsaved', and taking up the prophetic voice of the church by weighing in on peace and justice issues outside of the church, in the society around it, as Jesus did for the woman caught in adultery.

Such an approach to ministry, mission and church vocation is holistic and eschatological, as we are reminded by the Lutheran World Federation's Department for Mission and Development in its Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission document.

Proclamation of the gospel, calling people to believe in Jesus Christ and to become members of the new community in Christ, participation in the work for peace and justice and in the struggle against all enslaving and dehumanizing powers are therefore an integral part of the mission of the church. All such activities point to the reality of the reign of God and to its final realization at the fulfillment of history.⁷⁶

⁷⁶*Together in God's Mission: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1988) 9

In this project I have been engaged in unlocking the meaning of *missio Dei*, unearthing the reductionist shortcomings at Trinity Lutheran Church and composing and delivering the sermons, for a transformation. While the sermons are meant to initiate a transition to missional, I suspect the actual transition would be a slow, tedious process.

I chose the Board of Trustees at Trinity as my Lay Advisory Committee. At the Board meetings we would discuss the content of my project and my progress. They liked the idea of looking for a new direction for the church but they are apprehensive about the extent of *missio Dei's* challenge. They were also not happy with my portrayal of Trinity as self-serving. Joyce, the chairperson, who read an earlier draft, noted that sermon 5 was "exceptional" but that, "reductionist gospel is still a bit confusing for me."

On February 15, 2020 I began consultations with the congregation on *missio Dei* and becoming a missional church, after the third sermon, but after one session these had to be stopped because of the pandemic lock down. The twelve members present were enthused and willing to get involved, even though they were not conversant with the missional essentials. Also on February 22, 2020, a stage show was organized in Kruger Hall to showcase the cultural diversity of the community around Trinity. It included African, Indian, Hispanic, Caribbean and European cultures. The aim was to affirm and learn about other peoples and cultures.

I was surprised to discover the reductionist gospel, and the negative critique of the western missionary movement as "an enormous enterprise of cultural and economic domination, cultural arrogance, and ideological intolerance"⁷⁷. I was pleased, however, to discover the details of the true mission and vocation of the church, the *mission Dei*, and the emanating understanding of mission as an activity and an attribute of the Triune

⁷⁷ Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, 47

God rather than soul saving or church planting, though not to make light of the value of these.

I discovered the missional church to be an authentic expression of the church, the deficiencies of the self-serving and attractional church models, and that I am the Pastor of a church that has the characteristics of both. Subsequently I came to the invaluable recognition of the urgent need to redirect my congregation's plan and vision for the future to a program of missional transition. I became aware of the church's call to be incarnational and to recognize the eschatological reality of the kingdom in our midst. I also engaged in missional hermeneutics to write the sermons. All of this made this project a transformative and priceless experience for me.

The transition this project is seeking would mark a major shift and transformation for Trinity, as perhaps for other such churches, and hence it requires time, patience, perseverance and the power of God. For all of the above reasons, as well as for the reason that the journey to discover the meaning of *missio Dei*, the analysis of Trinity and the writing and delivery of the Sermon Series were such major feats, I could not include in the project an element of measurement of the sought after transformation. I believe it would come, though, with lots of prayer, re-preaching the sermons over time, study group activity (like the one held on February 15, 2020) and putting up posters on salient missional points around the church. The project did set out to initiate the transition and I believe it has done that. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, as a Chinese proverb states.

I believe this project is of great importance. As members of society we all have a responsibility for what our society is. We must all strive to make our communities more

just, humane and equitable, by becoming more socially conscious and empowered to participate in a process to move it in that direction. Herein I believe lies the importance of this project because it helps us to realize that as Christians our only concern should not be about going to heaven, being blessed and living holy, however we may describe those, but also that we participate with God in bringing about justice, peace and liberation for those in need, dehumanization and suffering. It is a call to come out and be counted amongst the peacemakers, the merciful and yes, the persecuted.

This project also makes a significant theological contribution by highlighting the immanence of God. As we saw in our exploration of *mission Dei* God is not only present but also active in the community and calls God's people of faith to join God in God's redemptive work. Reminders of the presence and nearness of God, Psalm 46: 1, Matthew 28:20, are always encouraging and uplifting especially when compared to the sometimes more dominant understanding of the Divine as transcendent or far off and beyond our present experience. Believing that God is present and active in the world's problems, as in the *missio Dei* concept, speaks about the will of God and the love of God and hence has the power to boost faith and spirituality and prayer life.

The call to return to *missio Dei* and the challenge to be missional is a call to see the error of a reductionism only focus, to make a U-turn, to see contemporary ministry in the vein of Jesus' Judean ministry. It's a challenge to get involved, to be present in the community addressing the issues and participating with God in the process. The practice of *missio Dei* brings relevance and pertinence in today's real world context to the church. It is an urge to commit to becoming interested in the earthly well-being of one's neighbors and fellow citizens and inhabitants of the planet rather than in the eternal

destiny of their souls alone.

The objective of this project is transformation of Trinity Lutheran Church by returning to what I see is every church's vocation and purpose. I must confess, though, that it has had just that effect on me. When I started this project I did not know where it would lead. But it has led to a transformative effect on my understanding of mission and its importance, on what it means to be the church, and on the whole of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and hence on me as a pastor. I have based my ministry thus far in my career on a reductionist view of the gospel and mission. But this project has had an eye opening effect on me and points me now in the direction of holistic ministry and mission. At the end of the day the sheep follow the shepherd and transformation of the sheep begins with transformation of the shepherd. So to God be the glory.

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