

## Rethinking the Mission: Part 1

### Quotes and Questions

1. What have we lost by subscribing to the Christendom-mode of leadership that is mainly defined by the pastor/teacher roles, missing out on the remaining equipping gifts (Ephesians 4:11) of apostle, prophet and evangelist?
2. How can we avoid becoming enamored by our own static (rooted in one place) expressions of faith or those that surround us, and instead understand and remain faithful to the principles and practices that defined the dynamic movement of the early church?
3. Do we really believe that if we live this way (incarnational/missional), God's Spirit will be unleashed to work and move in our neighborhoods and cities? Do we believe that God will still do this? Or are we satisfied with continuing the status quo, simply because it is familiar and comfortable?
4. Can we expect Jesus to multiply simple churches, if we continue to define ourselves by our sacred spaces (buildings and services), rather than being missional communities, whose lives are oriented to living and thriving alongside nonbelievers?
5. Looking back on this teaching and Kevin's challenge to us (from 2004), have we become prepared to live radically within our communities? Are we doing that now? Do we share in Kevin's vigor for this work?

#### Quotes:

"In the apostolic mode of existence, the more biblical mode of the church, there was no dedicated sacral buildings. The church back then was the assembly, it was the people. But as Christendom kicked into existence, buildings became central to the notion of the church, and its experience. Another point of contrast would be how leadership operated in the apostolic period. It operated under the five-fold ministry leadership ethos that Ephesians 4:11 captures, where we are told that Christ, when he ascended, gave to the church apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. That was the primary mode of leadership during that time. However, as time wore on, leadership by institutionally ordained clergy, operated primarily in a pastor/teacher mode, if you question whether that's our current way of thinking, just look at me this morning. I am ordained and I function in a pastor/teacher mode. Early on, the church was more missionary, incarnational, more of a sending church. It was a people who tried to en flesh Christ and live out that life of Christ before others, to demonstrate what the church was. But what the church became, and still is in many instances, is attractational. In other words, it attempts to attract people to its building; and in doing so, it extracts people from their culture."

"As we stand here at the dawn of a new millennium, we believe that we must, at long last, give up trying to rejig the paradigm to suit the massively changed paradigm of the Western church. It simply has not worked. In fact, it has created more problems. The church is in decline in almost every context in the first [modern] world. The church is worse off precisely because of Christendom's failure to evangelize its own context and establish gospel communities that transform the culture. The missional church, with all its fluidity and lack of buildings, in its failure to institutionalize, has been far more successful from the margins. It's high time that we come to grips with reality and recognize that the Christianity that we largely practice is infused with structures and a theology that simply does not reflect the bible's view of the church. We need to radically rethink the mission. We need to craft a new theology that sufficiently represents the intent of biblical authors who were

writing under the Holy Spirit's inspiration. We need to become educated in contemporary culture and learn anew how to speak the gospel to lost men and women."

"There are a myriad of crises that face the Evangelical church. One author lists a number of them... diminishing numbers, clergy burnout, loss of youth from the church, the end of denominational loyalties. We have the problem of biblical illiteracy. People just don't know the bible. There are divisions in our churches. We have often, not here, irrelevant forms of worship in our churches. There is a loss of genuine spirituality that our faith really makes any difference in our lives. There's widespread confusion about the purpose of the church, and the message that it should be articulating. If you and I, who make up this church family, are going to be obedient to the mission that Jesus gave us. We are going to have to think radically different about our purpose in life, about the mission that Jesus gave us. We are going to have to ask hard questions about whether or not we really are, or will become a missional church; or whether we have been overcome by the cultural accretions of institutionalism. Each and every day that we sit here and wait for the world to come to us, we lose valuable opportunities to fulfill Jesus' mission. Every time we fill our lives with church activities, leaving no time for unbelievers, we demonstrate that we are not yet a missional church. Every time that we want to hold fast to traditions, simply because they are comfortable, we refuse to engage our culture, and we lose ground in fulfilling God's purpose. We are going to have to challenge some ideas and attitudes that we hold sacred. When in reality, they are nothing but leftovers from a time when Christendom was the dominant cultural reality. Frost and Hirsch offer this penetrating analysis, "The heart of the problem is that we have been planting churches that are smaller carbon copies of the already beleaguered, failing, Christendom-style church." The Christendom virus is passed on. In duplicating an already failing system, we are digging the same hole deeper, in our attempts to dig somewhere else. In fact, it's more often than not been the case that Sunday services are planted, rather than missional, Jesus communities."

"The existing church, which is invariably static, rooted in one place, institutionalized, needs to recover its sent-ness in order to become a missional church. I'm going to ask you as a congregation, my brothers and sisters, to think hard with me and carefully with me about this matter. We have laid a foundation over the last seven years [1997-2004] that has brought us now to the central issue. The time is ripe for us to examine the emperor, and see whether he has any clothes on, or not. But let me give you a clue. How many people are part of our community today, right now, because we have taken the gospel to them and they have responded to it? How many, sitting beside you today have become members of this community because we have taken the gospel to them, and they have responded in faith? That's the issue. They aren't walking in the doors. We're not doing the work the way it needs to be done yet. We aren't doing the right things yet. We need to get our own house in order. We need to be more fully engaged in the mission. Such an effort must begin in earnest and it must begin now. I am setting before you a challenge to walk with me down a path that I do not know where it leads, except that its final destination is fulfilling the mission that God has given to us. I want us to begin to prepare ourselves to live radically within our different communities that we have live up to this point in time. I want our changes to be substantive and carefully thought out, but courageously faced. We have hovered around some of these ideas for a long time and we have examples of the churches in Quebec who have grappled with these same issues and serve as a model to us and are encouragers of us along the way. We have worked very hard on many issues in recent year. We have laid a good foundation, but my friends, it is only a foundation. The real work has not yet begun. ESL and MOPS, of course, provide excellent venues for what our entire church family needs to be involved with. The relationships that we have been building with unbelievers take time. All of you know that God has restored my strength. He hasn't healed me, but he restored my strength. I have vigor for this work. We have a great team of men and women among us whose hearts beat to become a missional church. Let's get to the work."

## SERMON NOTES

*"Rethinking the Mission: Living Wisely"* (Col 4:5-6)  
Kevin L. Rhodes (June 20, 2004)

As a church, we must become *incarnational* in our ecclesiology ... *incarnational* rather than "attractional"

*"The issue of cultural context is essential because the missional church shapes itself to fit that context in order to transform it for the sake of the kingdom of God. By definition, the missional church is always outward looking, always changing (as culture continues to change), and always faithful to the Word of God. In many places it is so radical it barely resembles a church as we know it. In other cases it might appear conventional but is in fact incarnating itself into its community in surprising and exciting ways. Above all, we're convinced that what will ultimately be required is Christian leadership that values imagination, creativity, innovation, and daring."*

(Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 7)