

A large flock of sheep is grazing on a green hill under a warm, golden sky. The sheep are scattered across the slope, with some in the foreground and others further up the hill. The overall scene is peaceful and pastoral.

To SHEPHERD

a movement

ONE PASTOR'S JOURNEY FROM **MAINTENANCE TO MISSIONAL** PREACHING

Larry Teasley

A SEEDBED SHORT

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“TO SHEPHERD A MOVEMENT”
Published by Seedbed: Sowing for a Great Awakening
An initiative of Asbury Theological Seminary



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In September 2010, I experienced a significant transformation in my life that I can only describe as a second Pentecost. This experience was theological, spiritual and epistemological in nature. It began as a planted seed when I attended a seminar led by Reggie McNeal in Birmingham, Alabama in early January. The seed germinated as I read *The Forgotten Ways*, by Alan Hirsch and began following Brian Russell's blog on missional hermeneutics. It took root and sprouted during the Catapult Conference, a missional event held in Mobile, Alabama. From listening to McNeal, reading Hirsch's book, following Russell's blogging and hearing each of them, as well as other missiological speakers at the conference, I came to the stark realization that I am, at heart, a missional pastor.



Honestly, I should not have been surprised by this insight. I think I had known this for a number of years. However, I did not have the vocabulary to articulate such self-expression, nor did I have a grasp of the epistemological framework of missional church to lead to a greater self-understanding. *In the end, I concluded that for more than twenty years, I had been a missional pastor, trying to maintain and lead purely institutional congregations, several of which seemed determined to remain as such.*

Over the course of that time, I frequently found myself frustrated by trying to serve as a “chaplain” to my congregations, while inherently knowing I was sent as an apostle and prophet.

They wanted to hear how Jesus could help them with their problems... *I told them how Jesus could make them bold witnesses.* They wanted to hear how Jesus could help them through their troubles... *I told them how Jesus called them to make disciples.* They wanted to hear how Jesus was getting them ready for the age to come... *I told them that the Kingdom was at hand.*

At times I felt guilty for not giving them the comforting word they longed for, but only offering them a challenging call to mission. *Now I can see that I was a missional pastor serving in maintenance churches.* Rather than being true to myself, I attempted to be something I was



not. By the end of 2010, I came to accept myself for what I was... a missional pastor, called to alert people that the Kingdom of God was at hand “through announcement and demonstration of the reign of God in Christ” (Frost, *The Road to Missional*, p. 24).

While I am a missional pastor, by calling and ordination, I am equally a missional preacher, by calling and gifting.

In January 2011, I began a sermon series on “missional church” based on a selection of passages which Brian Russell identified as his favorite missional passages. As I preached this series, I noticed a pattern of speech and vocabulary, as well as an intentional emphasis on certain themes. *After some reflection, I came to believe that homiletics, like hermeneutics, could be guided by a missional framework.* Moreover, I noticed in myself a sense of well-being as I preached this series. In other words, it was what I was supposed to do and I knew this without a doubt.

As a missional pastor and preacher, I must ask, “What is a missional homiletic?”

Brian Russell has already done a tremendous amount of work on a missional hermeneutic, and he has been helpful in my own growth to understand and grasp this concept. However, building a bridge from the Scripture to the “sacred desk” requires a sermon, not only driven



by a missional hermeneutic, but shaped by a missional homiletic. How would that look, from a practical, functional perspective?

I would suggest that a missional homiletic engages first and foremost the paradigm of proclamation. *The goal of a missional sermon is to announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God.* The New Testament bears witness to this reality. The announcement of the arrival of the Kingdom served as the predicate for the preaching of Jesus. “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near,” were the first words from His lips (Mark 1:14-15). Luke records this announcement as the paradigm of preaching in the early church (Acts 2:22-40). Even the Apostle John gives us a glimpse of this paradigm as his fundamental proclamation to the world (1 John 1). Moreover, in the context of the Greco-Roman world, this announcement was not just “good news.” It was also radical news because it led to the logical corollary of proclamation: the confession of faith in Jesus, not Caesar, as Lord.

Thus, in a missional homiletic, the kingdom of God is announced and demonstrated through Kingdom living, whether by signs that are miraculous or acts that are merciful.

How then do we in the 21st century proclaim the Kingdom and demonstrate the rule of God in Christ from the pulpit?



I think we can take a cue first from the vocabulary of the Eucharistic tradition. One needs only to remember that in the early church, the Eucharist was both the initial proclamation and demonstration of the Kingdom's arrival and the reign of God in Christ. Specifically, the Eucharistic liturgy proclaims not only the arrival of the Kingdom as the rule and reign of God in Jesus Christ, but the coming of the future Kingdom, as well.

As part of The Great Thanksgiving, we recite the post-Sanctus, the “mystery of faith,” which proclaims “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.” For missional preaching, the post-Sanctus can serve as a guideline for the sermon. *No matter what text is used, the missional sermon proclaims this “mystery of faith.”* Thus, the sermon establishes its Biblical authority and posits its missional directive by announcing the Good News of the Kingdom, revealed by God in Jesus Christ as evidenced in Scripture.

To illustrate, two biblical narratives come to mind. Consider 1 Samuel 16:1-13, the account of Yahweh revealing to the prophet Samuel that David, Jesse's son, will be the next king of Israel, succeeding Saul. Traditionally, I have heard this passage preached as 1) God's lack of concern with external appearances (i.e., God sees the heart, humans see everything else), or 2) God uses the weak and foolish to confound the apparently strong and wise (after all, how can you have a boy king?).



Using a missional homiletic, one could preach that God was announcing at that moment, in spite of Israel's pestering Him for a king, God would find Himself a king that not only pleased Him, but that could see His mission done. Ultimately, this mission would not be completed by the incumbent King David, but by his descendent, who, in fact, David himself would call Lord. Thus, long before the New Testament is written, we hear "Repent, and believe the Good News. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Jesus is Lord!"

A second narrative, from the New Testament, is the parable of the Wayward or Lost Son. Located in what some call the "lost and found" chapter, it is the last of three parables which proclaim and demonstrate the Good News of the Kingdom. Traditionally, it has been preached as the story of God's grace and forgiveness. I have heard it presented as an explanation of God's grace and love, noting that God watches us, even while we are in the far country, continually looking down the road, hoping, even longing for our return. I have even heard the story presented as the father being the true prodigal, since he lavished his wayward son with forgiveness and reconciliation.

While these truths are found in this passage, a missional homiletic might give emphasis, not only to the omniscience of God, the Father, but also to His omnipresence. A missional sermon on this pericope could suggest that God is not only



omniscient, capable of seeing us and knowing us while we are in the far country, but He is also omnipresent, Himself, right there with us in the far country. The homiletical text might be crafted as follows:

And to show how relentless His love is, God was not content to just watch us from His throne. He came to us as one of us, to lead us back to Himself. His mission has always been to announce to us His Kingdom is at hand and He is ready for us to come home. He has always longed for both our presence and our allegiance. But, because He loved us so much, He could not wait for us, and so He sent to us, not our elder brother, bitter and refusing to celebrate our return, but our eldest “brother” who not only finds His joy filled by seeing His Father’s mission done, but orchestrates an even great celebration in Heaven when someone lost is found. He did this in His sacrificial death and resurrection. And when He returns, and takes us home with Him, then we’ll celebrate, as well. But until then, He sends us to the far country on His behalf to lead back home those He loves.

Thus, we see the proclamation, announcing the Kingdom at hand, that Jesus is Lord, similar to the post-Sanctus: “Christ has died for you, risen for you, and will come back for you. Repent and believe the Good News.”

If the post-Sanctus is the paradigm which shapes the fundamental homiletic of missional preaching, then missional language and thematic expressions provide its substance. As I continue listening to conversation within



the missional church community, I see several themes emerging, such as *Missio Dei*, missional DNA, incarnational presence, outsiders vs. insiders, organic vs. institutional church, and realignment to the principles of the Kingdom, to name a few. Several of these themes surfaced in the missional sermon series I mentioned earlier.

As I crafted the sermons in the series, I began to see patterns of vocabulary emerge; language that encapsulated the essence of these missional themes. I also discovered certain expressions reoccurring, many of which reflected tones of missional conversation. Moreover, these patterns and expressions tended to center around the concept of “missional community.”

One example is found in the sermon, “Our Claim to Fame” taken from Genesis chapter 1. In his comments on this passage, Brian Russell notes the audaciousness of claiming that we are made in the image of God. Our “claim to fame” is that we are made in the image of God to bear witness to the world. By this, we have an inherent mission. Adapting Brian’s terminology within the sermon text, I said:

God’s intent from the very beginning was that His human creation would go into the world and make sure that His presence was known. We were created to go into the world, to let everyone know that the world came into being because of God. We and the entire world are His handiwork.



We see that in the beauty of nature, the grandeur of the mountains, the depths of the oceans, the vastness of the universe, the timing of the seasons. And yet, as wonderful and as majestic as it is, we have dominion over it.

Now, I'm not going to get into any environmental issues here, but I want to suggest to you that having dominion over the earth involves more than limiting our carbon footprints. I'm not saying that such things are not important. What I am saying is they are not entirely what this passage is about. We have dominion over the world as we go into the world taking the message of God to it. We bear His image, we reflect His character, and we offer His message. That's why the last thing Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew's Gospel is that they are to go into the entire world. To have dominion over the world is to claim the world for Jesus Christ. Thus, it is truly audacious to say that our claim to fame is that we belong to Him and give witness to Him because we are made in His very likeness.

Herein, expressions and patterns of vocabulary of “being sent,” the *Missio Dei*, and “incarnational presence” are used as a construct of a missional homiletic.

Another example comes from a sermon entitled, “Loving God”, taken from Deuteronomy 6. Therein, I develop the nature of the missional community as rooted in their covenant love for God established by the oneness and supremacy of Yahweh. In the *Shema*, the *Missio Dei* is lived out within the covenant community as an expression of exclusive worship and faithful obedience to Yahweh. However, it is in the perpetual teaching of



the *Shema* to future generations that the covenant community becomes the missional community. To express this idea, I said:

What strikes me as interesting about this directive is its audience. This directive is addressed to a community. Oh, it starts with an individual, but it extends to the entire community. The individual's responsibility—his or her act of obedience—was to teach the truth of God. But it was the community's responsibility to make sure it was never forgotten. E. Stanley Jones once wrote, "Christianity that doesn't begin with the individual, doesn't begin. Christianity that ends with the individual, ends."

Do we love God with all our heart? With all our soul? With all our might? Do we find life marked by this moment by moment relationship with God of love and trust and obedience? Are we intentionally realigning our understanding of who we are in relation to who God is? *Are we realigning our lifestyles and practices to perpetuate the mission and forge our future in the Kingdom of God?* Are we sold out to Him to the point that we are nurturing others in this first priority commitment? Do we love God well?

Within this sermonic text, the concept of the missional community emerges as the fundamental characteristic of the covenant people of God. Once again, the missional homiletic is fashioned.

A similar example from the New Testament is found in Matthew 4:12-25. In "A Royal Invitation," I deal with the



idea of discipleship as an invitation into the Kingdom of God, offered no less than by the King, Himself. The irony of this passage becomes vivid in the make-up of those invited in: the marginalized, the lost and forgotten, and the deplored and disregarded. In essence, Jesus invited the “outsiders” in the world to become the “insiders” of His Kingdom. However, along with the invitation comes the expectation of “realignment” to Kingdom principles and practices. In essence, they become a missional community. To communicate this concept, I wrote:

Now, let me say, that until recently, I had always thought this passage was about evangelism. Jesus calls Simon and Andrew and James and John to follow Him and He tells them He will make them “fishers of men.” And that’s in here, no doubt. But in the last year or so, I’ve been seeing life and ministry and Scripture with what I call “Kingdom Eyes.” That is, I’ve been seeing it with the perspective of the Kingdom of God and all that means.

So Jesus comes preaching, “Repent, the Kingdom of God is at Hand.” He is offering an invitation to follow Him and become part of His Kingdom. And He is preaching to everyone, the great and the small. No King had ever done that. Herod never did. Caesar never did. In fact, neither of them knew most of these people existed and never cared about them, much less went among them. But Jesus came preaching, offering this invitation.

And as He is going along, He meets two sets of brothers in Capernaum, Simon and Andrew, the sons of Jonah,



and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They are fishermen, not the religious elite. They are mending their nets, not memorizing the Torah. And Jesus offers this royal invitation: “Follow me and I will teach you how to fish for people.” He is inviting them into His Kingdom. He is inviting them to live under His rule, to realign their lives according to His purpose and will, to see that His mission is accomplished. And they accept His invitation. By offering them this “Royal Invitation,” He is building a kingdom community, a missional community.

Towards the end of the sermon, I conclude,

Today, Jesus issues us “A Royal Invitation” to become active disciples by realigning our lives according to His will and His mission. He calls us to be disciples and to make disciples. We respond to this invitation, recognizing that WE are a missional community sent, committed to fulfill the mission of God in the world by demonstrating and declaring that He is Lord of Heaven and Earth.

These are only a few nuggets I have discovered on my own “road to missional.” With them, I am only beginning to see and understand some of the implications a missional homiletic has for ministry and mission, for preaching and practicing the Gospel. I do so, working them out “with fear and trembling.” My hope is that some well-credentialed scholar can do more with them than I.

As for now, I offer them to you, the reader and faithful colleague, commending to you a life of missional preaching



as we announce together the present reality of the Kingdom of God and the future hope He gives us because we know and confess that Jesus is Lord!



About the Author



Dr. Larry Teasley is an elder in the Alabama–West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church. He also serves on several district committees and conference boards. Teasley, a native of Milton, Florida and a graduate of Milton High School, went on to receive a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees at the University of West Florida in Pensacola. He received his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky in 1987 and 2000, respectively. His hobbies include golf, fishing, hunting, and collecting power tools.

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