

## Sermon Notes

April 12, 2015

Pastor Rich Braaksma

(2) Last week was Easter.

Easter is kind of a big deal. It's like the super bowl of Christianity. Jesus is risen from the dead! We **with** him have passed from death to life; A down payment on our future in God is made; Sin, death, and hell have been conquered and no longer stand in the way of us being found whole, clean, new, alive, filled with glory...

But then the question... So now what?

Now what do we do? How do we let Easter soak into our lives? We know and believe that Jesus has won for us life after death, but as I heard someone recently put it, Life after death, sure, but a tougher question, is it possible to have life **before** we die!?

(3) Matthew 28 paints the scene right after Easter: Jesus has risen from the dead. The disciples journeyed up from Jerusalem to Galilee to wait for him on the mountain he told them about... A little different from the accounts in John or Luke of appearances in rooms where they are gathered...

But Jesus appears to them on this mountain and it says, "When they saw him they worshipped him. But some doubted." But then Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go..."

Now these words of Jesus are famously known as the Great Commission but if they **weren't** so well known and you took a more **cynical** reading of the text you might see this as the ultimate act of deference.

All power and authority has been given to **me**! Therefore, **you**, go! Do something worthwhile!(4)

But a form of this gets repeated 5 times. In Mark 15:16, Go into all the world and preach. In John, As the Father has sent me, I am sending you! In Luke

the same and then in Acts **the whole book** is set up as, “Okay Jesus lived, he taught, he suffered, he died, he rose from the dead, that was **just the beginning** of Jesus ministry. **Now** it continues with you! Go **do** this, **live** this, **be** this.”

(5) That’s the language of the book of Acts, this book in the bible that tells the story of what happens after Jesus is raised and ascends to heaven, now what?

And the very first line of that book, Luke, the author says, “In my former book dear Theophilus [his former book being the gospel of Luke] I wrote about all that Jesus **began** to do and teach...”

**Began** to do and teach?

The implication is that the church’s story is the story of Jesus **himself** continuing to do and **teach** and **live** and **love** and **welcome** people to a new and expansive vision of God and relationship... (6)

And of course, that’s why Jesus great commission was not a deferment at all, it was Jesus saying, “My life continues in and through my people.”

That’s the logic of Pentecost, the Spirit falls for what? So we get **infected**, **overtaken** by the very life of God – to be the hands and feet and mouth of Jesus.

It’s a bit of an intimidating calling.

How do we understand ourselves living that out? **Do** we understand ourselves living that out? Does that picture conjure up something that is exciting, thrilling, inviting? Or more like a terrible burden that no one could live up to? Like a guilt inducing message that says, God gave his life for you so you better measure up! What are you doing to change the world? The twin monsters of guilt and fear spring to life most often in religious contexts and, frankly, distort our vision of who God is and what life is.

So I’m glad to have the chance to preach this morning at New Hope... as we engage in this strange discussion as two churches... (7) could we join together? Could we be better together? For us? For NW Calgary? What goodness and zestyness and life-filled-ness is God calling us to?

And part of that is examining our visions... right? But part of that a little bit is, “Could I bear to listen to this person for 20some minutes on a Sunday morning?” Right? No pressure.

But getting to know each other is risky, scary, exciting. And I think when we do explore something like this as people following after God – who moves and calls... It’s not the same as two companies deciding to merge, it’s more relational and it calls us to put ourselves out there, to be vulnerable, to try to see each other through the eyes of the Other.

Right that’s when relationship happens when we see ourselves our monstrosities, our beauty through the eyes of the other.

I tried to describe how John does a two book sermon to a friend from LA the other day, I wonder what you’d think of what I said, I said, “John approaches creation with this kind of almost mystic, see-the-good-in-everything, appreciation **assuming** that God is there, **everywhere**, in a sanitation worker, in the composition of a hit record, in the fractals of light from a dew drop on a leaf. And to behold God, there, and celebrate it.”

**Recognizing** that God is everywhere, in everything is not unique... but steadfastly approaching culture and creation as text the way New Hope does... that **is** unique and beautiful. Hillside this morning are hearing a sermon on an audiologist – that will be a new and different experience.

So what’s unique about Hillside? What is monstrous and beautiful and other? Well one thing I wanted to share with you... About a year and a half ago Hillside went through a re-visioning process. We dropped our tagline, “To know Christ and make him known.” Not that we don’t think people should be interested in knowing Christ and making him known...

But we adopted a new phrase that seemed to fit us... Hillside Community Church, “Accepted, in Fellowship, and On Mission.” (always 3)

So we set out with this idea, wouldn’t it be cool if each person in our congregation would **know themselves** to be a person who is “accepted,” known,

God's beloved. "In fellowship" that we belong to each other, brothers and sisters on the basis of grace, not self-generated awesomeness. And "on mission" in the sense that each of us occupy our life – make it count!

And of course, all of us find ourselves to be rubbish at occupying our own lives which might lead us to despair but thankfully, we go back to the "accepted" bit and we've come full circle.

And probably the biggest part of that has been the "on mission" phrase. But we've also found that that missional language can come off as churchy, or people knocking on the door with copies of the watchtowerish, or long slideshows in church basementsesque, or imperialistic...

(8) So that's why I thought I'd double down and shared some images of the most stereotypical images of "mission" I could find and share "well actually what we mean when we say "on mission" is..."

Because really, language is whatever... Maybe the old wineskins work, maybe we need new ones, but the thing that matters is that we drink good wine together. (9)

That's tweetable, on the one hand, but also could be very misconstrued if taken out of context.

The term "missional" has kind of arisen as a technical term fairly recently to mean something different among those who study church growth... or church decline as the case may be.

And it has been this shift has been looking at how churches have operated generally over the last 100 years or so in North America saying, okay you have churches that start as ethnic clustering, greek orthodox, dutch reformed, tribes finding their solidarity in church.

Then you get the evangelical movement and the church growth movement where churches try to distance themselves from lines of distinction that divide and instead be inclusive to win people. And with that comes the development of an **attractional** model of doing and being the church. This is the place where we

have the best music, the eloquent preacher, the best summer sports programs, we have live sheep for our nativity play and angels that fly through the air thanks to invisible wires...

But both are models where the church institution is the center. On the one hand, to be a good Christian means you come here to get your spiritual fill, volunteer on Tuesday night, help make this work, these programs function, and on the other hand, reaching the world means bring them here to the professionals.

“Missional” in church speak is this conviction that maybe for Joe, the accountant, dad, and hobby aircraft enthusiast the church shouldn’t be saying, “Come and serve” but should be saying, “Hey, you are the site of God’s moving, speaking, acting in the world so how can we serve you to be fully alive, fully aware, of the God who... as New Hope might put it, balances spreadsheets, God who fathers us, God who attends to detail in hobby aircraft making, God who causes us to soar.

Peter Rollins (10), a bit of a radical theologian / philosopher type and not completely orthodox to be fair, was speaking once at Calvin College and being a bit cagey with his specific beliefs. And one of the students was trying to pin him down, “Just answer the question, do you deny the resurrection of Jesus?”

And Rollins answered, “Yes. I deny the resurrection. Every time I live in my dullness and comfort, every time I ignore the beauty of this world, the opportunities to show love, I deny the resurrection. But I affirm the resurrection every time my eyes are open and awake, to God moving, loving, being present in me and through me...”(11)

But our temptation is to have our lives compartmentalized – our modern enlightenment culture trains us to see things this way.(12) We have our work life, and our family life, and our church life, and our social life, and our online life... And they bleed, sure, but they are separate worlds we occupy and navigate.

And for most of us, if these are different worlds or spaces, well 40-60 hours of our weeks are work, whether it’s an office or the home or both, hours are

spent at the dinner table, or shopping for groceries, or trying to herd children like cats into a mini-van, or loading the dishwasher, or watching our favorite TV show, or going on a date night, or reading a book, or studying for a test, or worrying about the crappy stuff we see on the news.

And if “God” is limited to the world allocated as “church” well that’s a small vision of God...(13)

But then, on the other hand, when we hear that from churchy people speaking behind pulpits (or kindles as the case may be) we think, “Oh, I know that line – you’re wanting me to drag my churchy self into all these places. You’re wanting me to see targets on the backs of my co-workers, you’re wanting me to always be “on” and “good Christian” and be “looking for opportunities” instead of just plain being excited for five minutes that the Flames are in the playoffs.

And that’s when missional language is abrasive is when it assumes that compartmentalized worldview. A worldview where the church is a taskmaster and maybe even God is a disapproving overseer saying, “You give so many hours to your job and you can’t spare an hour or two for God?”

And that’s where I hope, I think, that there is a connection between Missional and Two Book, or whatever language we want to use. Because **you**, as New Hoppers especially, **know** that when you’re filling a spreadsheet or cleaning a toilet or answering an email you don’t need to conjure up something to bring God into that place, you are imaging God **already** and it is just a matter of opening your eyes to see it, and ears to hear it, and heart to enjoy the present God who... I don’t know... could be described as the everywhere God in everything.

But the point is that you are the site from which you experience life – you are the ground zero of your own existence, thought, perception. So you are the site at which, in which, through which you will experience God and **please not only in church**, not even primarily in church, but hopefully you get reminded of it in church.

So how we’ve tried to get at this is with missional language, but if we don’t like that, what about if we see the church like a better business bureau... each of

us are like franchises of God's love and presence and we come together to spur each other on. Or what if we see church like a half time at a football game... we watch some tape, celebrate the good, reflect on what can be improved and cheer and rally as we go back to the game which is "out there." Or maybe we see church as a giant AA where busted up we come together, accept each other, and acknowledge that higher power and that where that higher power shows up is in the other six days.

Or, if we're people who know enough that we can read creation as text that when we wake up in the morning and we look in the bathroom mirror (13b) we see there – every bit as we see it in a nurse, in a STARS rescue operation, in a reggae song – looking back at us, that haggard, tired, beautiful person looking back at us is also a parable through which and in which God is speaking and revealing Godself.

And that little bit is the title I chose for this morning (13c), "Reading the Bathroom Mirror as Text." And I tried it this week. It's not easy. Looking at myself in the morning before I make myself all pretty like I am now. I've noticed this line, right here on my cheek. It's getting more pronounced. Below my chin is starting to droop a little – it's hereditary. There's no stopping it.

Believing that God is speaking here. Not once I get my act together. Not once I start reading my bible more or praying as I should as I ought. Just now, just like I am. Just where you are.

It's not a question whether or not God is going to show up in our lives it's a matter of whether we are going to show up – or wake up, because it's not a something we do, it's a something we're caught up in that may well lead to doing of every sort. [14 - end]

After rising from the dead Jesus blows his Spirit on us and says I'm with you. And he says, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore, you go! And it's not meant to fill us with dread or fear, it's a grand comedy, a beautiful joke where the likes of the you and me we confront every morning in the bathroom mirror – that is the place where his presence dwells.

Call it what you will, God's mission that sweeps us up, the present God that nudges us to notice him everywhere... It's life, it's the author of life who came to give us life that we may have it to the full.

And whatever happens with Hillside, with New Hope, whether we travel as one or two, we get to encourage each other, to invite each other to see these visions of our God and the life he gives us.