

# **The Cariboo Ministry:**

## **Discovering A Post Christendom Church**

By David Webber

Part 2 of a Keynote Address given to the Circle-M Rural Ministry Conference: “**New Shoots from Old Roots.**”  
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### **I. Distracted**

We had been anticipating it for weeks, my ten-year-old Grandson Jacob and I.

We had talked about it, dreamed it and meticulously planned it; a spring bear hunt up the headwaters of Knife Creek.

I knew just the spot.

It was an area that had been cleanly logged perhaps 30 years ago with lots of aspen and birch left standing like sentinel clumps in large openings of lush green grass.

Black bears are almost completely herbivores in the spring, eating grass and forbs voraciously.

My spot was black bear heaven.

And so we planned all winter, finally negotiating the one spring Saturday when I could get away and Jacob could come and stay over night.

We left before dawn, heading out in Faulknerian fashion to stock the bear. We bounced along the bush road, both of us in excited silence, savoring the anticipation of the bear hunt and its grandfather/grandson dynamic.

Finally, after easing our way in four wheel drive down a power line right of way we came to the trail that wound its way upward to the bear patch.

We started up the trail.

I was demonstrating to Jacob the secret to stalking stealthily so as to make absolutely no noise.

Bears have notoriously poor eyesight but particularly sensitive hearing and can hear a branch brush a pant leg for great distances.

And so, we stalked for about 15 minutes along the trail into the bush.

“Grandpa! I have to pee.”

Jacob whispered with a particularly painful look on his face, afraid he had somehow spoiled the hunt with the news.

I motioned him to back off down the trail and to step to the side to do his business.

I continued to study the trail ahead as I waited.  
And then it happened.

The largest black wolf I have ever contemplated stepped out onto the trail. He was about a hundred yards away quartering towards me and just staring at us.

Without even thinking, breaking all my own rules of “you only shoot what you can eat,” I threw up my single shot rifle in its ancient but formidable 45-70 caliber and let one go.

The large caliber 45-70 has a huge thunderous voice and kick when you unleash it.

I had unleashed it so quickly that I didn't have it completely snugged into my shoulder.

The piercing clap of thunder emitted from its barrel touched off several simultaneous reactions.

The wolf jumped straight up in the air about four feet, swapped ends and nearly detaching his head and tail in the process before running away unscathed.

The rifle jumped straight up into my face and clobbered me with an upper cut that nearly tore off my jaw.

And Jacob, with his back to the whole show and in full relaxed peeing mode when the thunder struck, jumped so fiercely he nearly tore his equipment off.

He shouted, “Grandpa! What on earth was that.”

That, was the end of the much anticipated daylong bear hunt.

It had lasted 15 minutes.

There was no point in continuing.

Every bear in the country would have run over the mountain after such an uproar.

I had become distracted and tempted and ruined it all.

As we drove home, I looked across the pickup at the silent youth sitting beside me.

He looked tremendously disappointed with a kind of transparency and honesty that only a ten year old can have.

And later when I reflected upon it, he reminded me of me at a number of times in my life, most particularly when I was a neophyte Christian, still without whiskers in the church, deeply disappointed and wondering what on earth I had become a part of.

At 30 years of age I felt like I had begun a journey that had tremendous promise and hope but I was making it with a companion community that was plagued with something akin to ADHD, easily distracted and tempted to drop what it was supposed to be doing to chase the first brightly colored butterfly that flitted past.

I would read the New Testament and see the church and what it was doing there, and I would look at the church I had fallen in with and what it was doing here.

In the New Testament church I saw nothing of costly consecrated buildings, priestly ordained clergy, elaborate administration and costly programs.

Rather, I saw small bands of believers meeting mostly in peoples homes - - "households of God" Paul called them -- with every member a living stone in the body of Christ and every member a priest functioning in ministry according to their Spiritual gifts.

I saw people functioning as overseers or elders but no ordained titled institutional officials.

It seemed like the church I was journeying with was forever being distracted by its buildings, clergy, government and programs.

When I would say something about this to the leaders and elders in the church, very often my "naivete" would be rebuffed and I was made to feel like I was ten years old and barefoot standing in a church of well-gowned academics that really had their brogues on the ground and knew what was best.

I vowed then to never ever lose my "ten-year old and barefoot" hope. And Hope springs eternal.

A little more than eight months ago, hope began to look realized as about 70 of us took our shoes off, so to speak, at Forbes Presbyterian Church in Grand Prairie Alberta.

We were participating in a conference called "Eldership Unleashed."

In one of his five excellent addresses, the theme speaker, Bruce Fraser from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand had a lot to say about the distracted church.

He referred to it as the church of Christendom.

He spoke about his perception that in this age Christ was reforming the church.

He looked forward to the reforming church or post Christendom church as one more closely resembling the first century church.

Bruce shared a vision of the post Christendom church as one where the institutional distractions of building, clergy, programs, and administration would be replaced with a grass-roots decentralized church.

He looked forward to the leadership of the church once again embracing the apostle, prophet and evangelist, not just the pastor and teacher, as it worked to equip the whole people of God for ministry of the church (Eph.4.11).

He envisioned a priesthood of all believers church, meeting in committed community in small groups, led by lay people, overseen by elders, ministering prophetically on the fringes of culture with a missional stance rather than struggling to stand in the middle of culture desperately trying to reflect it.

He dreamed of a church where the sacraments would be de-institutionalized and become central to faith and community once again.

I have never felt more hopeful for the church at large as I sat and listened. It was like my good friend Bruce was preaching from my notes.

I know I was not alone in my hopefulness.

Since that time other voices have been raised in a similar vein.

And then an Assembly or a Synod or a Presbytery happens and I wonder about the power of distractions again and a church with ADHD tendencies.

I will continue to keep my hope alive as I go about enjoying the church where I live.

I have been blessed to live out my hope in a congregation of rural house churches in the Cariboo.

We look a lot like that first century church, not identical but very similar.

And as I live out my hope there, I confess to being generous in my hope for the church at large and my attitude towards it.

I will allow for costly dedicated church buildings, priestly type ordination and elaborate administration and programs as long as we can all agree that the New Testament says absolutely nothing about them and generally what the church institution says about them is all wrong.

## **II. The Cariboo Ministry: Discovering A Post Christendom Church**

So what follows is a pictorial story of a rural example of a post Christendom church.

It's an example of the birthing of a rural congregation, which is founded upon the New Testament principle of an intentional hermeneutical and eucharistic community of faith which I described in detail in session 1 of my presentation.

The pregnant question in this birthing is: What does the Bible say about the church?