

First of all, let me say how much I have enjoyed being with you.
I applaud your work and ask God to continue to bless you.

Continuing Questions

What is the purpose of the church?
What is your identity as a disciple, and
secondarily, a congregational leader?

Transformation and Hunger Tied.



The final count in our tally of interests
was, of course, a tie between
transformation
and hunger & happiness.

Let's think about those two.



And see what happens.

One theological starting point.

- Salvation is about healing as much as it is about where we will spend eternity.
- Salvation (*soteria*) is also the Greek word for both salvation and healing.
- The story about Zaccheus...
 Jesus: “ Today *soteria* has come to this house.” Luke 19: 1-10

Another quotation.

- Richard Rohr, *Breathing Under Water*.
- “Seminaries train people both in preaching and teaching, but not healing.”
- In light of what Jesus said to Zaccheus, how does this bear on our answer to the question of what the purpose of the church is?

Healing is Transformation!

- This topic is centered on healing, which is itself transformational. We are always in the process of healing and being healed.
- So, we will look first at the theology of transformation. *Metanoia = always being converted, always being in the process of growing in the love of God and neighbor (defined by our faith in Christ).*

OUTLINE

- Theology of Transformation.
- Areas of transformation
 1. Consumerism
 2. Hunger
 3. Aging
 4. Alcoholism
- What is the purpose of the church?

Starting point: We have been saved,
we have been healed, by God.



This is the Gospel of Resurrection.

This is God's action in Jesus Christ.

You have been resurrected, renewed.

Our response to God's resurrection is to live more and more into that resurrection for ourselves and others.

While the "not yet" has not yet arrived, yet we are grateful for the "already" that has.

So then,

- We are talking about how to live into that transformation that is defined by the life, death, and resurrection that is visible in Jesus Christ.
- In the Eucharist of the Body of Christ
- And available in the community
- And being interpreted by and through the relational sharing of the Word alive and working.

Perhaps one might even say....

- This is the intentional,
hermeneutical,
Eucharistic
process that is church. Any
clues there to the purpose of
the church?

Back to this earth which is infiltrated by heaven to be sure, but still....

Turn to the notion of a double bind, which is where many rural congregations and leaders live.

Gregory Bateson talks about a double bind:

Three factors:

- the situation or the message is important and cannot be ignored,

- there have to be two competing and contradictory meanings in the situation which cannot be held simultaneously in agreement, and

- the leader (or institution) is not allowed to comment on the contradiction that is present and does not allow resolution.

This double bind must be healed.

- The leader or the congregation will be constrained and remain ineffective so long as all three elements of the double bind remain unspoken.
- The task of the leader --- to get the community to face into its problems, not to solve them but to shape the questions that will bring learning, will allow people to deal with them.

How can we be freed from this body of death?

- We have been.
- But not fully.
- How can we live into the transformation that will permit honesty?
- Will bring resurrection hope!
- One clue: shaping the questions, maybe letting the Word or the Eucharist shape....

Is this close to the situation?

Do we live in a double bind which blocks transformation?

Are there forces which encourage us not to recognize or speak the situation?

Are these situations blocking our healing?

A set of hypotheses:

- 1. We are dis-eased by having been socialized by the false god of consumerism.
- 2. How can we be healed if we know that our comfort comes at the cost of people's starving or experiencing great suffering?
aging and alcoholism
- 3. The rural church has resources to engender the healing of Christ.
- 4. How can we be transformed?

Hunger and Happiness: Feeding the Hungry, Nourishing Our Souls.

- Area One.
- Thomas Berry: “We cannot be fully nourished in the depths of our being if we try to isolate ourselves or to deprive others of their share by increasing our own; for the food that we eat nourishes us in both our souls and our bodies.
 -we enrich ourselves when we share our possessions with others. We starve in some part of our being when we hoard.

Consumerism.

- When Cam was telling the story of the man who had bought up all the sections of land around him, except for two, I thought that this man was probably a hero of capitalism.
- But he was starving.
- There is a double bind at the heart of consumerism: buy your way into happiness; but God intended the world for delight and sharing.

We cannot hoard and share at the same time.

- But we are told over and over that we can buy our way into happiness/spiritual fulfillment.
- Consumerism is the greatest challenge to the Gospel of justification by faith through grace.
- We cannot serve both God and mammon.
- To be sure, God wants us to delight, to enjoy good things, FOOD.
- But we cannot enjoy if others are starving.

We can be stuck.

- Stuck in a system that appropriates the work of others and which come to us through the hardship of others. We cannot avoid this in one way.
- We are complicit in this system of consumerism. “He cares more for the neighbor’s land than he cares for the neighbor.”

CHEAP FOOD POLICIES.

- Are destructive of:
 - The health of the affluent and the poor.
 - The economics of developing nations and of the developed nation.
 - Farmers and rural communities.
 - The earth community
 - And even the spiritual well-being of the affluent themselves.

I believe that the tough question
that we evade and that leaves us in
a double bind is that of

Complicity

How can we get out of this double bind?

- We regret complicity,
- but we will be stuck and have to deny it if there is not a way out. We will be stuck.
- Only an awareness of the grace of God will allow us to move beyond this double bind.
- We can only be aware of this complicity if we are first aware of God's forgiveness.

We know forgiveness through community.

- we can become aware of it,
- we do recognize the possibility of new life,
- we are in community,
- we have empathy, a point of connectivity (empathy), and
- the experience that forgiveness is possible. Then we need a rule of life that makes incarnational sense to us (healing).

NEW LIFE!!!!

- Complicity is itself a gift of grace.
- Which is recognized when we know there is a creative way out of this bind: the forgiveness of a God who saves us, resurrects us, who reaches into what we thought was life-giving (but wasn't) and says: Follow me.
- I think that the church is an instrument that communicates the possibility of God's love and new life.

Dynamics of transformation.

- I used to think that the sequence of transformation went like this:
- Sin ----punishment-----repentence--- transformation.
- But now I am convinced that the more powerful movement is:
- Sin---unconditional love --- transformation --- repentence and new life.

What does transformation look like in the area of global hunger?

- Consumerism is powerful. We in the church can learn some things from twelve-step programs:
- We can come to admit that we are powerless over our consumer complicity – that our lives have become distorted.
- We can come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity, to spiritual well-being, or happiness.

Made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God.

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of our our lives, including our complicity.

Have been persuaded that we could live another way and tried to practice the way of transformation in all our affairs.

Elements of AA that are recognizably in compatibility with the Gospel.

- Willingness to surrender to God.
- Confess that we are at fault and not try to blame others.
- Come to regular and candid small group meetings frequently.
- Talk about our own failures and how we are trying to make amends.

Practical Steps

- Join a CSA.
- Grow your own food, give plenty of it away.
- Support organization that fight global poverty, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, Bread for the World, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and....Canadian equivalent.
- Social entrepreneurship – domestically and internationally.
- Others?

Rural Church Resources

- The rural church has been freed from many of its external institutional restraints.
(Sometimes we have lamented that, but sometimes not.)
- We know that the calvary is not coming.
- We are ahead of the curve in ecumenical cooperation.
- We know that food has power and sharing is powerful.

Difficulty:

- Here's an issue for you in light of the theory and theology of transformation we are working with:
- How can one be the adaptive leader that Heifetz and others talk about who will cut through the Gordian knot of the double bind?
- How can we be the leaders who know how to ask questions that will lead to learning?

Transforming Questions:

- What do we need to make a difference in the next three to five years in order to be more faithful?
- What is the purpose we are called to serve?
- Right here and now?

A thought:

Sometimes we whine about the age of people in our congregations.

We need “young families”, etc.

Let me somewhat humbly suggest that the elderly have gifts to bring: realization that you don't need to please everyone, time, energy, desire to make a difference, loss of debilitating ambition, and we know who we are.

Most importantly,

- We are no longer terrified by death. We wake up one morning and find that the fear of death has been taken away from us. I do not say that we have thrown it off, but that somehow God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves – God has given us the sense that death has been overcome.
- We are resurrected, transformed people.

Couple of caveats....

- We are all a resurrected people, who are in the process of transformation...
- Who know that resurrection is real.
- Who want to respond to God's great gifts to the rural congregation with great leadership and with power.
- Maybe the question is not so much the purpose of the church.

Maybe, instead...

- The question is: what are the questions (the conversations) I as an adaptive leader need to encourage?
- How do I live as a resurrected person/a disciple?

If you are interested in receiving either of the two presentations that I have done, please just sign the yellow pad that is being passed around.