

**A Way Forward**  
A Sermon by David Barker  
October 30, 2011

**Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10**  
**Luke 13:10-17**

This morning we come to the sixth and final sermon in a series where I've tried to lay out the foundations of a vision...

- a vision of what it means to be church, to be the Lord's heart and hands right here, right now
  - it is a vision rooted in Scripture...that God is a missional God...a God who calls God's people to go forth to be a blessing to all nations
  - a God who has a mission—redemption of a broken Creation, with all that means...a God who has chosen the church...you and I...to be the primary vehicle by which that mission is accomplished
- it is a vision, therefore, rooted in the conviction that we are called to do our part in making the Kingdom a reality in Longmont, Colorado...that we are the greatest blessing to our community we can be
  - a blessing of such magnitude, in fact, that were we to somehow disappear overnight, this community would gather and mourn our passing
- it is a vision of Central Presbyterian Church becoming a missional church
  - that means a church where we define our life by and organize our ministry around the call to be an agent of God's mission in the world
- and we do that in large measure by becoming an incarnational church
  - that means a church where we faithfully, visibly live our commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ every moment of every day in the very midst of the community we're called to serve

If it's a radical vision, it isn't because it's new

- the choice to become a missional/incarnational church is simply a choice to return to being church as Christ intended his church to be from the very beginning...the church as, indeed, it was for much of the first four centuries of its existence
- it is also a choice to be faithful to what our own polity as Presbyterians expects of us

- no...if this vision is radical, if it seems so different from the way we're used to doing and being church, it's because the way we're used to doing and being church, however comfortable, is in so many ways contrary to the call God has placed on God's people from the very beginning
  - church, which God intended to exist primarily for the sake of those outside of it, exists instead primarily for the sake of those within it
  - what was intended as a vehicle for going forth is instead a vehicle for staying put...not, go out into the world to live the Good News but come here to us and receive the Good News
    - missional* becomes *attractional*
- and confounding as that is, more confounding still is that the attractional church we've become no longer works
  - among the vast majority of those who represent the future of the church, church as you and I have always known it simply isn't an option

It's mindful of this that I've suggested five elements, five components of what, more specifically, it means to embrace missional church

- first, that we are called not to be served, but to serve
  - a church that is primarily about our needs, our comfort is not so much Christ's church as it is our church
  - and God didn't call us to be a blessing to ourselves but to others
- second, our scorecard for success will not be church growth but community impact and transformation
  - we have to expand our ecclesiastical comfort zones to be willing to move and minister outside these four walls into places where the Holy Spirit is already at work and calling us to come along side and help
  - that however excited Jesus might be to find us all sitting here, he'd probably be more excited still to find us living our faith out there
- third, that attractional vs. missional church is not either/or but both/and... attractional for where we are, missional for where we're going
  - the future of the church may not respond to attractional ways of doing it, but we can have a vision for the future only because we have a past and a present, both of which are to be honored and nurtured
  - we can transform for the sake of the Kingdom without turning our backs on what has brought us here
- fourth, an openness to new ways of being church
  - in the spirit of the Reformed conviction of reformed, ever reforming, we need to remember that the church is to be in service to the mission...the mission isn't in service to the church
  - even as we honor our past and present, we should be willing to consider carefully and sensitively the very structure of the church...how we go about doing what we do, to ensure that it enhances our mission...
  - to be willing to ask, is this effective or do we just do it because we've always done it?

--and fifth, seek first the Kingdom

--live lives where our lives themselves bear witness that being with Jesus is our first priority...we live trusting the Lord will provide...our values and priorities are the Kingdom's values and priorities

--this is the incarnational part: we don't just go into the community to do mission...we *are* the community and we *live* mission

OK...that's all well and good, David, but can you be more specific...details, please...should we say yes to all this, what'll it mean the next Sunday when we show up at church?

--well, first of all, let me say what it *doesn't* mean

--missional is not a new program, not a new initiative to grow the church...no new committees, new meetings, new brochures

--it isn't just a new way to talk about church

--it isn't just a call to do more church stuff

--*missional* is a way of living...you don't come to church to do church because you're living this every moment of your life

--it's discipleship, if you will, to the nth degree...what Jesus meant when he said go, therefore, and make disciples—notice he didn't say *church members*—of all nations

--it doesn't mean all you may understand as church gets turned upside down, completely remade, or done away with altogether

--you won't show up that next Sunday and find everyone and everything you know gone

--in fact, even if this vision is the one we embrace, you needn't experience any change at all if traditional, attractional church is what you're about

--what you know and have come to expect will still be here... there will just be other things happening, too

--and it doesn't mean this is all figured out, that we have all the answers

--we don't...much of how to make missional work we'll have to figure out as we go along and we *will*, I promise you, make mistakes

--but if we are faithful to God's purpose for God's church, God will use even our mistakes to help us find our way

--So what *does* it mean?

--the detailed details are in the presentation beginning during Sunday school next week, but here are some broader details...

--first, the language we use about church will change some

--"missional" and "incarnational" will get said a lot, obviously, but also words like "impact," "transformation," "Kingdom," "permission-giving,"

--other words we'll likely hear less of: "committee," "statistics," "meeting," "reports"

- second, the mission of God, which we'll understand in our specific circumstance as being the greatest blessing to the Longmont community we can be, will become the benchmark for most of what we do
  - so we'll be continually asking ourselves, how does this—whatever “this” is—enhance our ability to bless our community?
- third, embrace your inner missionary
  - that thought scares some of you to death
  - but understand what I mean: we each have a mission field, a sphere of influence...the places and spaces we occupy everyday and the people we share them with
  - and remember God's admonition to the Israelites: live holy lives and by how you live, bear witness to me
    - no one's suggesting you light a candle and pray at your desk or proselytize in the break room
    - it's simpler than that: our faith is more than a profession, it is an ethic
  - if we consistently live what we believe, people will notice...they'll know you follow Jesus without you ever invoking his name...should they ask you about your faith, you can respond as the situation allows
  - the real work will be done by the Holy Spirit
- fourth, individually or in groups, look for a way to be a blessing to this community
  - most of us are already doing this to one degree or another, but remember what I suggested last week
  - being missional is more than volunteering in the community because even raving atheists volunteer in the community
  - the missional difference is that the volunteering you do is not just one activity among many that you make time for
    - it is a natural expression of who you are as a disciple of Jesus Christ
    - it's not just something you do, it's who you are
- fifth, whatever we do as individuals, there will be a larger ministry in which we're engaged as a church
  - this will be an outgrowth of discerning the people in our community we are being called to serve
    - the Holy Spirit is at work among these people now, preparing a place for us, and will lead us when we're ready
  - these people may be an ethnic group—Hispanic, Indian...they may be defined demographically—elderly, youth, pre-K...they may be defined economically—working poor, urban poor, underemployed...they may be defined socioculturally...homeless, single mothers, pregnant teens

--whoever they are, we can rest assured the Lord has raised up this congregation at this moment because we have the heart and resources to do for them what no other congregation in this community can

--lastly, what this may mean to you is that it means nothing at all...and that's OK...

--if nothing about this vision lights your fire because everything about it leaves you cold, we are all brothers and sisters in the body of

Christ who call Central PC, Longmont home, and that will never change

--we will continue to learn and pray and worship and walk with one another, no matter what

--growing the Kingdom means there is a place within it for all of us

In closing—I've not forgotten we read some Scripture earlier, and what we read does have something to do with what I've been saying...in fact, it has everything to do with it

--most of us are not Jeremiah

--whatever we were created in our mother's wombs to be, it probably wasn't to be a prophet

--and most of us, unlike a prophet, feel uneasy and unprepared about sharing our faith with people who ask, let alone be confrontational about it with people who don't

--nor are we Jesus

--the fully human part, yes, we *are* that...but fully divine, not so much

--in living our faith, we can neither speak for God as God, nor do we possess the power to say a word and heal some physical infirmity

--yet each one of us nonetheless is called by God to a ministry, a mission both prophetic and healing

--simply by caring enough, by trusting enough, to believe that the gifts we've received as children of a loving God were given us not just to be used in a church, not just to be used in our own lives or the lives of family and friends, but in the lives of all people among whom we live and breathe and have our being

--by, where we are, living what we profess, coming along side others, the heart and hands of Jesus...

--a prophetic message can be shared without us having ever spoken a word

--a burden can be lifted and someone bent over for years can stand upright

--the call of God to go forth and be a blessing to the nations is answered...the work of the Kingdom is done...and the church fulfills its mission

--you and I, it is in our grasp to do, right now