

MAPPING FBC DNA: Community Transformation

Luke 4:14-21

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Watch/Listen: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/mapping-fbc-dna-community-transformation/>

Over 200 years ago, the explorers Lewis and Clark set out on their way to the west coast, mapping the new Louisiana Purchase. *Canoeing the Mountains* is a book about their journey. Author Tod Bolsinger points out that the expedition was built on a completely false expectation, that what was ahead would be the same as what was behind them, that unexplored west was exactly the same geography as the familiar east. Churches make the same mistake.

That is precisely the reason we engaged in this discernment and then visioning process. There has been a culture shift, and it's one that lines up with scripture. Churches used to attract people to programs, and people came to the building, all at the same time. And we counted the noses of those who came in. The shift is such that mission, not programs, attract people, and we should be counting how many go out to serve, not come in to be served. Verses 14-16 demonstrate that Jesus kept moving; the power of God was not nailed down to one building or organization. I've often wondered if the name of our church should be First Baptist Church IN Jefferson City, but OF. We love this community. We are a part of it. We are IN the city Author Tom Bandy once asked it this way: What is it that Christ is doing in your life that your community cannot do without?

Now when we look closely at the text (vv. 18-19, Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 61), we see the other culture shift, which again, lines up with scripture. Christ came to make a difference in this world as well as the next. In Luke, salvation is bigger than going to heaven when we die. Oh, don't get me wrong. We want to go to heaven. More than anything, I want the people of Jefferson City to come to know Jesus Christ, to love, serve and follow him. But what does the Lord's Prayer say? "On earth as it is in heaven."

We don't have time to delve into all that is in this passage. But let's look at two deficiencies or needs and two of God's provisions. Two needs addressed, for both this world and the next: Jesus is "good news to the poor." Yes, the poor spiritually, but also the physically needy, those who are so empty, they are open to God's help. God can always work better and deeper when there is a vacuum in our lives. But also: Christ came to deliver the "oppressed." The bruised, broken, weak, shattered, like a vase or piece of pottery tossed aside.

The word for "released" and "go free" is the same in Greek. It is used in the NT to refer both to forgiveness and to being delivered from a literal prison. So Jesus wasn't limiting his ministry to this world or the next. Here's what I think. One hundred years from now, when someone studies American churches, they will marvel that we put so much emphasis on going to heaven while neglecting two "this world" issues: poverty and racial hatred. Read Jesus' sermon text again! (vv. 18-19).

Read the history of the New Testament church. Her best days have always been when she is not only saving souls for eternity but also starting hospitals, benevolent care for orphans and the elderly. The best days of FBC have always been when we live our DNA, with an outward, not inward focus.

While some of us were in Kiev, Ukraine this fall, we were privileged to visit the House of Mercy, caring for elderly homeless people, taking them in to apartment living. Here is what the director told us. He said in Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church is not trusted by people because of its close ties to the Kremlin. But he and other Evangelical Christians have more credibility because of the benevolence work they do in the communities. The church is never to align with politicians (on the Right or Left), but to simply be the church! Meeting needs, in Jesus' name.

This is born out by something Kristen Hilty, executive director of Common Ground, told our deacons a few months ago. We were discussing our community, especially the homeless in Jefferson City. We can give advice or money or official aid. But the only thing that really, really, really moves people forward is relationships. Getting to know people, building trust. Friendship without judging, without pre-conditions. God feels that love for every person on this planet. Every person in this community. Fierce and eternal, transforming love. A love that is out of this world, but also one that is IN this world.