

Message Title: A Church Without Jesus

By: Neil Silverberg

As you know, I have not been in the pulpit for the last three weeks here. I think Kelly and Mark and Tyler did great. I wanted to accomplish a couple of things in this short Sabbatical. First, I wanted you to see how deep our bench is; we have some great leaders in this church.

As I told you at the last Regional Community Church Meetings, I can't guarantee that you will always hear me but I can guarantee you will hear the same Gospel! Secondly, I needed time to be with Jesus. As I came to the end of this year, I sort of hit a wall physically and emotionally and felt the Lord calling me to seek Him and be renewed.

I do not do well with rest (I always see green lights, God telling me to go and do). I have a hard time with what Jesus told the disciples in Mark 6: "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." I don't often hear that and I need to hear it. So I have spent a lot of time this month with Jesus and my family, praying, reading and seeking God's heart.

Most of this time wasn't about the Church and the vision but about my own soul. That's why I wanted to sit under the other pastors because I needed food for my own soul. It's just so awesome to just have time alone with Jesus, to hear his voice not related to ministry but *to life!* I think left to myself, I am a lot like Martha rather than Mary. I like serving and doing but God in this time called for me to be like Mary who chose the good part that will not be taken away from her. I felt when I took this time that the Lord told me he wanted to "*recalibrate*" me.

I had to look that up. I found in the dictionary that to calibrate is to "*adjust or mark something so that it can be used in an accurate and exact way; to adjust precisely for a particular function*". I really feel like God did that during this time and it is a work in progress. I really covet your prayers as I continue to be recalibrated.

This is our last corporate gathering of this year. I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about what God did in this year because I really have a message burning in my heart that I believe will take us into 2014. What is clear is that in 2013, **God called this church to major transition.**

He gave to this leadership team a vision of the future which calls us to radical change. At the end of the summer, we presented to this church a plan for a relaunch of Trinity. This church voted unanimously that we should put this facility on the market for sale. So I am happy to announce that this is the last service in which we are known as Trinity Chapel. From here on out we shall be known as **Trinity Community Church (TCC).**

We retain the name "Trinity" because of its biblical implications and because of the rich history of this church which we don't want to lose. We have the word "*Community*" in our name because we believe God has called us to move beyond mere church attendance to real relationships of commitment, transparency and love.

Tyler and the team have been working hard to brand all of our literature. In January, we will launch a brand new website and we will demonstrate it. As we come into 2014, we believe that God will launch us in the vision, values and vehicle that are uniquely ours.

Trinity is a church with a rich prophetic history (there have been key prophetic words that are ours). I feel that Trinity Community Church is pregnant with purpose. Let me take a moment and talk about three things (vision, values, and vehicle).

Vision Statement: A grace-based community of dedicated followers of Jesus who share the mission of gathering those called into His kingdom. Our chief aspect of this vision is the message of the Gospel. If we are going to be a grace-based community then each of us must learn the Gospel. God doesn't have one message that gets us in and one that keeps us. The Gospel does both. *The Gospel not only brings us into the kingdom, it empowers us, it keeps us, and transforms us.* So Gospel preaching and teaching will continue to be a central part of TCC.

**Trinity Community Church Values:** *Community, Discipleship, Mission*

### **Community**

Community (we want everyone to experience the body of Christ as God intended). The word that really describes this is ***"belong"***. *We want people to belong to one another.* Some of you listening to my voice have never experienced church life. It's more than attending meetings; it's having deep relationships of transparency, authenticity, and love.

### **Discipleship**

This has two components to it. First, it calls us through the power of the Gospel, to ever-increasing growth. Secondly, as we grow in Christ, we are called to pour ourselves into others. This is God's way of bringing people to Christ and causing believers to grow. Jesus invited twelve men not to a Bible study but into his life. He taught them in the context of relationship. We must recover the lost art of discipleship if we want to live in our last value: mission.

### **Mission**

This is a value that we must hold. We don't want to grow by taking Christians from other churches but by every believer here being on mission together. We accomplish mission by how we come together.

We come together in three ways. **House churches** (basic Christian community); **Community Church** (corporate Sunday gathering for worship and word); and **City Church** (Community churches coming together regularly). ***We will be one church, with one leadership team, with one budget, one message, meeting in various locations.***

I prayed much about what to share today and felt a strong impression from the Spirit that God wanted to speak to us from Revelation 3. You know what one of the scariest things about the vision and values and vehicle is? It's that we would try to do those things and become those things without Jesus!

Just because we have a biblical vision and biblical values and a vehicle like multi sites we could be successful. But if Jesus is not at the center, we have totally missed His purpose and intention. That's why this passage in Revelation is so important. There is at least one church in Revelation among the churches that Jesus speaks to in which He's not even in the church!

In the book of Revelation, you know that in the first part of that letter Jesus moves among his churches and tells them what he sees. He portrays each of those seven churches as lampstands. In other words, they are each judged not in terms of how good their services are, or how great their pastor is, or how much of the gifts they have in their midst. ***The thing that each church is measured by is, "How much of an affect they are having on the culture?"***

It seems as the Lord moves among his churches that either the church is being affected by the culture or else is affecting the culture. The scariest thing is that each church might think they are doing fine, but then learn that that is not the Lord's verdict. *One of the reasons for this self-deception is the church might be measuring itself by the wrong standard.* There is one church in Revelation that really stands out when it comes to self-deception. What it thought about itself and what the Lord says about it were not even in the same ball park.

The question is, "Do we really want the Lord's verdict on our church?" Do we want to know what he thinks about how things are? Remember, he is not judging on the basis of how good our services are, or how many we have coming or how much money is in the till. ***He is judging each church in terms of how they are doing when it comes to shining the light of Christ on the darkness of their world.*** The church is called to ***reflect the light of Christ to their world.***

A couple of the churches are doing okay; the light of the Gospel is shining brightly through their witness. But in many of the churches the culture is affecting them more than they are affecting the culture. That is especially the case with the last of the seven churches, Laodicea. Let's look at the passage:

*And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.*

*"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."*

*Revelation 3:14-16*

Jesus comes in their midst and says, "I know your works." How come he doesn't say, "I know your hearts?" Why is he so intent on our works?

Well, we are not saved by our works but by grace through faith. But, while we are not saved by our good works, *we are saved for good works.* He tells them that when it comes to their works, they are

lukewarm. Traditionally, we have been taught that being lukewarm is a description of their personal spiritual state, the state of their hearts. It is not; **it is a description of their usefulness or effectiveness.** Jesus, in using this description of being lukewarm, is definitely referring to something Laodicea would immediately recognize.

About six miles north of Laodicea was the town of Hierapolis. This city was famous for its hot springs that were used for medicinal purposes. South of them was the city of Colosse which was known for its cool waters that attracted many in the summer. Laodicea had to import their water because the water there was tepid and lukewarm, good for nothing. The waters of Hierapolis and Colosse were used medicinally for healing, restoration, and recovery.

Laodicea's waters were good for nothing. They were not serviceable, had no healing virtue. Jesus now speaks to them and says that the condition of your water is the condition of your church. Just as lukewarm water is useless because it can't bring healing or refreshing, so they are useless when it comes to their ministry to the world.

The saddest thing about this is they didn't even know it! They thought they were fine! You know why? They were looking at their church from the standpoint of how much money they had, how many people were coming, how much possessions they obtained. *"For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked"* (Rev. 3:17).

What a statement that is unfortunately so true about many American churches that are enamored by buildings, bank accounts, and their own glory. No matter what people tell you, Jesus isn't impressed with how big a church gets or how much money it has. You know why? **Jesus judges the church not by whether they are consumers, but whether they are missionaries.**

I can't help when I read that to think of something God said to Israel through Isaiah. They were fasting and were upset because it seemed like God wasn't noticing their fast. God says to them, "Let me show you what a real fast is like."

*Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of wickedness,  
to undo the straps of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed<sup>[a]</sup> go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover him,  
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?  
<sup>8</sup> Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up speedily;  
your righteousness shall go before you;  
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.  
<sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;  
you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'*

*If you take away the yoke from your midst,  
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,  
<sup>10</sup> if you pour yourself out for the hungry  
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,  
then shall your light rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be as the noonday.  
<sup>11</sup> And the LORD will guide you continually  
and satisfy your desire in scorched places  
and make your bones strong;  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters do not fail.  
<sup>12</sup> And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to dwell in.  
Isaiah. 58:6-12*

I'm sure when Isaiah spoke those things the people were shocked just as Laodicea was when Jesus described their church. Jesus tells them that they are self-deceived; He tells them their real state is that they are *"wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked"*.

The worst state a person or a church for that matter can fall into is self-deception. There is only one reason that this church was in this condition: it failed to see any need. They ceased to be needy! What's the first word that starts out the Sermon on the Mount? *"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God."*

Blessed are they who know how bankrupt they are for to them belong all the riches of the kingdom. It's a dangerous place to no longer be needy, to no longer see the condition of your soul and long for Jesus. There are some here today who are no longer desperate for Jesus. You used to love getting up early and spending time with the Lord.

You love pouring over the Scriptures and hearing God speak to you from his Word but no longer. Don't you realize that your soul is empty and it is either being filled with the world or filled by Jesus with his Word and Spirit. There are some of you who are more excited about the latest hobbit movie or Hunger Games sequel than what you are learning in God's word. *You go to the world to have your thirsty soul replenished and therefore have no real hunger for God. Ask God today to help you to see the real condition of your soul.*

**If you want God to change you, you will need three things:**

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

Rev. 3:18

“gold refined by fire.” (trial, difficulties, tough things that God lets us go through so that we can stay close to him). Don’t let the difficult things you are enduring be in vain. Learn from them to draw near to God so he can draw near to you. “white garments that you may clothe yourself” (trusting in nothing but the perfect righteousness of Jesus). ‘Eye salve to anoint your eyes” (Laodicea was famous for an eye salve they produced that was used for medicinal purposes). What a difference it makes when I begin to see; first my own needs and then God’s provision in the Gospel for such a one as me.

I know what you’re thinking: this doesn’t seem very loving. This isn’t commensurate with the Jesus I grew up with, the Jesus who only says nice things, who is never harsh, who doesn’t require anything. That’s because the Jesus you grew up with is a false Jesus. “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19). This is love; this is the ultimate manifestation of the love of God. Jesus is quoting Proverbs 3 as does the writer of Hebrews: “My son, do not despise the discipline of the Lord or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father the son in whom he delights.”

What should they do? “Be zealous and repent.” Change your mind which will lead to a change in affections which will lead to a change in action. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. *If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me*” (Rev. 3:20). What an incredible promise. This statement is directly linked to the verse before. The disciplining hand of love is rooted in an offer made not to the whole church, but to individuals within it. This is not an evangelistic appeal. He is not speaking to unbelievers and offering them salvation. This is a call to a church. Jesus is outside the church knocking on their door and saying, “Will someone let me in?” Jesus is outside the church. And all the while their testimony is, “We’re fine.” But look at his love. He is inviting us to hear his voice and respond by letting him in so that he can have intimate fellowship with us.

In the East, to be invited to a meal is an invitation to intimacy; you didn’t just eat with anyone. That’s why when Jesus was resurrected, he appeared to the disciples at the Sea of Galilee inviting them to breakfast and he cooked it! Can you imagine the apostles’ testimony: they told people that Jesus was alive. People asked, “What did he do?” They answered, “He cooked us breakfast.”

This is an appeal to everyone in TCC. Jesus is knocking on your door and inviting you to intimacy with him. Some of you have lost Him. You once loved him and treasured your times of intimacy, but no longer. Now, you seek intimacy with your friends and with Facebook more than being with Jesus. No longer is intimate time with Jesus the sweetest time in the world. Now television, movies, the Internet is where your soul goes to be fed. **There is only one way to change that: Repent.** We will not be successful as a church because of our vision, values, and vehicle but because we have a church filled with people who love Jesus, who seek Jesus, who treasure being with Jesus more than anything else.

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***Ed Rosen has provided the questions below for House Church Group Discussion.***

1. Neil shared his heart with us about having a hard time just resting in the presence of God and waiting on Him to hear His voice. He referenced the story about Mary and Martha and confessed that he was a lot like Martha rather than Mary.
  - a. Who are you like, Martha or Mary? Explain.
  - b. If you are more like Martha, what do you intend to do about it by the grace of God?
  - c. Would you be willing to humble yourself and ask your fellow house church members to pray for you and to hold you accountable?
2. What does it mean that we are a “grace based church community”? Explain
3. Neil said that “If we are going to be a grace-based community then each of us must learn the Gospel.”
  - a. What is the Gospel?
  - b. What are you personally doing to learn the Gospel?
4. Neil said that one of our values as a church is Community.
  - a. The name of the church has now been changed from Trinity Chapel to Trinity Community Church. We know from the Bible that people’s names are indicative of their character or prophetic, for example, God changing Abrams name to Abraham, *“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” Genesis 17:5*
  - b. What does it mean to be a community of believers in Jesus Christ our Lord?
  - c. What does it mean to belong to each other?
  - d. Why is church life more than attending meetings (important as they are)?
5. Neil said that another one of our values is Discipleship, and that it has two components to it. Name them and explain them.
6. Finally he said that our third value is Mission.
  - a. Why is it vitally important for us to be on Mission together extending The Kingdom of God?
  - b. What are the three ways that we will be coming together and how will they facilitate doing Mission?
  - c. How about individual Mission, is this a burden that you have and if not are you willing to change?
7. Why is it important that Jesus be at the center of everything that we do as a Community of believers?
8. Neil said “we are not saved by our works but by grace through faith. But, while we are not saved by our good works, we are saved for good works.”
  - a. Why is it essential as Jesus’ disciples that our lives be filled with good works?
  - b. What was the issue that Jesus had with the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-16? Explain.
9. Neil said “Jesus judges the church not by whether they are consumers, but whether they are missionaries.” Explain.