How many of you have ever heard the term “paradigm shift”? It’s a term that was first used in the scientific world. Thomas Kuhn first used it in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. He said “Scientific advancement is not evolutionary, but rather is a series of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions and in those revolutions one conceptual world view is replaced by another.” So simply put, a “paradigm shift” is a change from one way of thinking to another, a transformation, a sort of metamorphosis. A paradigm shift occurs when an old paradigm is seen to be obsolete and false and gives way to another.

An obvious example from the business world is the shift from huge, bulky mainframe computers which were the size of many living rooms to the personal PC’s. When the computer revolution first occurred, people had a hard time thinking of the change that was on the horizon. Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM said in 1943, “I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.” “There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home,” said Ken Olson, president, chairman and founder of Digital Equipment Corp., in 1977.

Here are a couple of other examples not related to computers. “There will never be a bigger plane built!” (A Boeing engineer made this statement, after the first flight of the 247; a twin engine plane that held ten people). Here’s my favorite: “The telephone has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us.” (Western Union internal memo: 1876). None of these people could see the revolution on the horizon. Do you know why? They tried to fit the new into the old but their old way of thinking kept restricting them from seeing what is on the horizon. Of course, it’s not just science and the world of technology that has undergone periodic paradigm shifts. The religious world has experienced them as well.

The Protestant Reformation was a powerful “paradigm shift” from one way of thinking to another. Under the old Catholic system, faith was defined as agreeing with church doctrines and dogma. Luther defined faith as, “a living and unshakeable confidence, a belief in the grace of God so assured that a man would die a thousand deaths for its sake.” Faith was no longer acceptance of church dogma but a living trust in God’s salvation. Incidentally, the Reformation changed medieval Europe not because a man decided it was time for a paradigm shift to occur, but because a man was transformed by the paradigm shift the Gospel produces.

You could argue that the ultimate paradigm shift in human history occurred when Messiah came to the Judaism of his day. When Jesus came he brought the kingdom to planet earth. But the Jews of his day kept trying to fit him in to what they had always known. Jews of his day were taught that to be a good Jew they should tithe, go to the
synagogue, repeat the Shema, and keep the feasts. Now Jesus comes and redefines everything. He says that being Jewish is no longer a matter of doing these things but becoming a follower of the Carpenter from Nazareth. He kept saying that the new wine of the kingdom must be put in completely new categories and ways of doing things. Religious leaders had a hard time dealing with that. Even the disciples had difficulty understanding that. We often forget that they were religious Jews who thought like most of the Jews of their day. Even after the resurrection, they are asking, "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

There is no doubt in my mind that there is a huge paradigm shift occurring in the Western Church today. It might be best described as a theological shift that calls us to move from thinking church to thinking kingdom. When I say move from thinking Church let me tell you first what I don’t mean. I don’t mean at all moving away from a biblical understanding of the Church. Church is a biblical word and we should treasure it. The Church is the “called out” assembly, those that God has redeemed, those who have been called. I am not at all talking about moving away from a “church culture” that keeps us focused on ourselves and our own needs and is content living in a sort of “sanctified isolation” from the world. Today, it is possible to live your entire Christian life within the walls of the church, never venturing out, and totally unconcerned with mission. In many ways, Church today has.

As long as you stay within the walls and do the things prescribed, you are considered a good Christian. So there are people who live their entire life within the confines of the church, never venturing out. I thought about entitling this message: The Local Church: Prison Camp or Training Camp? Most of us know what a training camp. It is a place where a soldier goes so that he might be adequately trained for battle. It’s a place where a boxer goes to train so when he steps into the ring he is adequately prepared for the fight. In both cases, the soldier or boxer never thinks his purpose is to stay in the training camp. No; the training camp is the place where he learns the skills that he needs so that he is enabled to go out and use them. In this regard, most local churches resemble prison camps rather than training camps.

A prison camp’s purpose is not to train people but to enslave people, to keep people in the walls. The walls that imprison us are not physical walls but walls of tradition and religion. We see a perfect example of this with The Disciples and the Woman at the Well. Disciples never saw her that day. Why? Because they grew up in Church and were not trained to see lost people but to fast and pray and go to church. Jesus saw a woman who was hungry for the kingdom because he was on mission.

So what does it look like shifting from thinking church to thinking kingdom? I think our text in Mark 16 provides us with three aspects of this shift. Now to be fair, this commission was literally given to the eleven and is unique to their calling and mission. Up until now they had only engaged in a localized mission within the borders of Israel. Now, he is calling them to the larger sphere of taking this Gospel to the whole known world. But what I think is clear is that in his training of these men, it was his passion for mission that He sought to instill in them. That was what drove him and there is no way
to understand this commissioning of them unless you see it in terms for his passion for mission. Isn’t it interesting that his initial invitation and his final commissioning of them was all about the mission? Remember his initial invitation: Follow Me (not be religious) and I will make you (sovereign grace) fishers of men (not respectable church members). Now we have his final commission and though it is first and foremost unique to them, it has a real application to the local church (in other words, it’s our commission to). He tells us in this commission (1) the nature of the mission, (2) the focus of the mission and (3) the power of the mission.

(1) The nature of the mission

The simple word “Go” tells us the nature of the mission. The nature of the Church is apostolic. “Apostolos” is the Greek word for “send” or “sent one”. So what is an apostolic church? It is a church with a mindset that says we are not to stay here but go. That does not mean if you are a disciple you have to leave Trinity and move somewhere else. No; rather, it means you have to change your mindset and start thinking not only in terms of “how can God use me in here” but “how can I have maximum influence outside these walls?” This is not easy for us because we have grown comfortable in the church and don’t want to go. “Pray the Lord of the harvest to ‘send out’ workers into his harvest’. There’s the word “send” again. For years, I assumed that it was the Greek word “apostolos”. It’s not; it’s the Greek word “ekballo” from which we get the meaning “cast out” or “expel”. It is used of demons being cast out. Demons never want to leave; they have to be strongly impelled. What does that tell us about workers? They don’t want to leave the comfort of the church and have to be kicked out. I really believe that we are being kicked out of the comfort of Trinity. If you don’t get this you won’t see the reason for planting other Trinity Community Church’s (TCC’s) throughout our region.

(2) The focus of the mission

Where are we to go? We are to go into the "world". Now again, to be fair to our text, this was their call to go beyond the borders of Israel and preach the Gospel. How do we in the church, many of who may never leave Knoxville or the surrounding areas, fulfill this? Well, we go into the world? What is the world? Is it a geographical place only? No, the world is not just a physical location but a system, a network of ideas that people share. It is the Greek word “Kosmos” and is used in places like First John: “Do not love the world.” So in one sense we are to hate this present order and come out of it and be separate from it. What does that mean? It means we should not be worldly, not to immerse ourselves in limited values. It means that we don’t live like others who think they are the center of the universe, but we live for God. But then, when we are truly world-denying and living for eternal values, he sends us right back to this world.

This is where it becomes murky because many of us were taught growing up that coming out of the world meant staying away from non-Christians altogether and having only Christian friends. I remember years ago talking to a brother about his discouragement that nobody at his work seemed interested in the Gospel. So I asked him, “Have you ever had anybody at work over for dinner?” He gave me a look like I was from Mars. “Of course
not, they drink beer and curse.” So we stay behind the church walls and invite people to come to church but we never venture outside of the walls. In this regard, we are not following Jesus. He went where sinners were, not just to share a message and run out but to really love them as well as call them into the kingdom. He was accused of being the “Friend of Sinners”. When’s the last time you were accused of that? We need a paradigm shift today that moves us from thinking of our lives in terms of inside the walls but outside.

(3) The power of the mission

It is found in three words: “Proclaim the Gospel”. So much of what is called “Incarnational Evangelism” today rightly emphasizes the need for us to enter the lives of those we are trying to reach. But they downplay the Gospel because they have lost confidence in it. So all of their focus is on social work, they help relieve peoples’ pain; in involving themselves in human institutions, in serving people in various ways. This has actually appeared over many generations, sometimes with different terms or words. In our day, we have seen a resurgence of a saying attributed to Francis of Assisi, “Preach the Gospel and if necessary use words.”

But the power of the mission is found in words. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.” The context of that is that Paul is talking about preaching and why it is necessary. Folks, we can go and enter people’s lives but if we are not going with absolute confidence in the power of the Gospel alone for transformation we will end up being social workers in Egypt. Paul tells us the secret of his ministry in the opening chapter of Romans: “The Gospel is the power of God.” The power is in the message, not our niceness or our winsomeness or even our methods. The only way we as a church can be successful in the mission is by having absolute confidence in the power of the Gospel. But if we are going to have confidence in it, we first have to know it and be partakers of its transformative power.

The Gospel isn’t just the invitation at the end of the message, it’s the message itself, focused totally on what God did in Christ. We cheapen it when we rush people to pray a prayer before they really understand their deep sinfulness and are called upon to repent and put their trust completely in the Gospel. Some of us are not well-taught in what the Gospel is. Today, a whole host of things have emerged in place of the Gospel whether it’s spiritual warfare techniques or social strategies. But give me a people who understand the Gospel and are continually being transformed by its power, and I will give you a people who can change the world!

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Ed Rosen has provided the questions below to use during House Church discussions.

1. How would you define a paradigm shift?
2. Are you open to a paradigm shift:
   a. In your life personally?
   b. In our church life corporately?
3. What did Neil mean when he said that we need a theological shift that calls us to move from thinking church to thinking kingdom?

4. What did he mean by “a church culture”?

5. In what way is the church analogous to a training camp?

6. With respect to MISSION, what does it mean to follow Jesus?

7. Neil concluded his sermon by giving us three points taken from Mark 16:15 And he said to them “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” The three points are, (1) The nature of the mission, (2) The focus of the mission, and (3) The power of the mission.

8. Concerning the nature of the mission:
   a. What simple word defines the nature of the mission?
   b. What does the word “apostolos” mean?
   c. What does it mean to be a apostolic church?

9. Concerning the focus of the mission:
   a. What does it mean to “Go into all the world” and yet not to be part of the world?
   b. Neil asked this question, “How do we in the church, many of who may never leave Knoxville or the surrounding areas, fulfill this”?

10. Concerning the power of the mission:
    a. What is the only power of the mission?
    b. What verse in the New Testament best describes the power of the mission?
    c. Do you understand what the gospel is?
    d. Do you have confidence that the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”? 