

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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The Church on Mission

By Rev. Sean McCann

In 1959, Scottish missionary Stephen Neill wrote, “If everything is mission, then nothing is mission.” In other words, if we broaden the category of the mission of the church to the extent that it includes everything a Christian or church might do, then we will effectively dilute the mission of the church to a watered-down and anemic definition that takes us nowhere. To gain and maintain a godly vision for our church, we must always focus (and refocus) our mission according to the principles of God’s word.

We began this year doing just that with three sermons on the mission of the church: Worship, Nurture, and Mission. Each sermon looked at one emphasis of our life together and elaborated on our mission statement in its three parts. As you all know by now, the mission of our church is to gather and grow disciples in Asheville and around the world. In the Great Commission, Jesus calls his church to make disciples, and we have broken down the idea of “make” into two parts: “gather and grow.” Whether it is covenant children or new converts, we aim to gather and grow disciples where God has placed us here in Asheville, and where he sends us around the world.

A logical question to follow the *what* of our mission is *how* – many churches share a similar goal, so how does Covenant Reformed in particular go about working toward the goal? To that end, we have drawn up a strategy: we depend on the Spirit’s power to gather and grow disciples by embracing the Ordinary Means of Grace in our worship, nurture, and witness. In brief, God’s Spirit does the work of gathering and growing through the word, sacraments, and prayer (i.e. the Ordinary Means of Grace), and it is our job to depend on these things to see God work. As boats in a river steer into the current to be drawn downstream, we want to find where the current of God’s Spirit is moving and steer our boat (the church in this metaphor) into the current as much as possible. Take a moment with me to review the three mission sermons so that we might see God refocus our mission together.

Worship
We began the series with a sermon from John 4:24 and Jesus’ response to the question from the woman at the well about the proper location for worship. In that sermon, I drew attention to the famous quote from Gordan Dahl: “As Americans, we worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship,” and encouraged us to reverse that final point about playing at worship by instead realizing that the church’s highest purpose is to glorify God by offering him the worship due his name. Under that main heading, we saw three ideas. First, the FOCUS of our worship is on God and God alone. We are worshipping creatures, and we ascribe worship to something, so to worship “in Spirit” is to ascribe to God the greatest of worth. From there, we saw the importance of our worship’s FORM, for the forms – or ways – in which we worship both guard the truth and guide the spirit. Thirdly, when we get the focus and the forms of our worship right, we see what true worship produces in the FRUIT of our worship. Here, the first sermon ties in with the next two, for true worship is formative in how it *nurtures* and matures our faith, and it is evangelic in how it bears *witness* to Christ and his gospel. Indeed, we have no greater calling than to worship God in Spirit and truth.

Nurture
In the second sermon, we looked at the inward ministry of the church to herself. From the first gathering of the church in Acts 2:42, we learned that God the Father nurtures his children unto maturity through the church. We broke this idea into three parts. First, the GOAL of nurture is maturity – a full-orbed maturity that includes the head (thinking the thoughts of God), the heart (feeling the affections of God), and hands (doing the will of God). And no matter whether we are more drawn to truth, beauty, or goodness, we need the church to help us mature in each area. Second, we looked at the PATH of maturity: how does it happen? The model of the early church was to devote themselves to the

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March – April			
<div>Upcoming Events</div> <div> For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; office@covenantreformed.net). </div> <div> The Lord’s Supper Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together. <i>Morning Worship:</i> March 2, 16 April 6 <i>Evening Worship:</i> March 30 April 18, Good Friday Service </div> <div> High School Youth Retreat March 7-9 </div> <div> Baby Showers Linton—March 4 Webb—March 21 </div> <div> Bridal Shower Sander—March 29 </div> <div> Second Breakfast March 8 April 12 </div> <div> Fellowship Meal April 6 </div>	<div>Weekly Events</div> <div> Sunday: Sunday School 9:30 am Morning Worship 10:45 am Evening Worship 6:00 pm Except on 1st Sunday </div> <div> Wednesday Evenings: Supper 6:00 pm Bible Study/Prayer 6:45 pm </div> <div> Bible Study For Men: ROMEOS 7:30 am (Retired Old Men Eating Out) at Cornerstone Restaurant Norm Bomer’s Home 7:00 pm Every Thursday 1st & 3rd Thursdays </div> <div> For Women: Gail Albee’s Home 9:30 am CRPC Bible Study 10:00 am Every Tuesday Every Thursday </div>		
	<div>Watering Seeds Podcast</div> <div> Be sure to check out our church’s weekly podcast, <i>Watering Seeds</i>. Each week our pastors review, discuss, and apply the previous Sunday’s sermon. You can find the podcast on any major podcast platform, such as Anchor, Spotify, or Apple Podcast, by searching for our church name or the title, “Watering Seeds,” or by scanning the following QR code: </div> <div>  </div>		

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apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. This summary pictures (in seed form) the basics of life together as a church. Through these ordinary means, church members learn the truth and, most importantly, are encouraged to believe the truth and press on in faith. Finally, we saw the ROLES in maturity. Here, we saw how those called to a special office in the church (i.e., elders and deacons) play a crucial role in her nurture, but also how those with the general office (i.e., all members) are called to devote themselves to the work and worship of the church. Nurture happens best when all the members are available for God to use in his work of bringing us each to maturity.

Witness

In the final sermon, Pastor Jim opened up Acts 1:8 where Jesus speaks to his disciples about their role as his witnesses. As the church, we are called to bear witness to what we know and have experienced in Jesus, or as Jim helpfully put it, “The church’s relationship with the world is defined as a witness to Christ.” The verb is *witness*, and he walked us through the three ways we witness, each corresponding with one of the persons of the triune God. First, we witness by the POWER of the Holy Spirit. This means that as we tell others about Christ, we trust the Spirit’s power to make our words of witness effective. We must be faithful to speak and then trust God to do

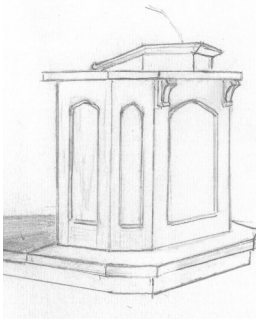
the rest. Second, we witness by the PLAN of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sends, and we obey and speak. And we must speak – for though our deeds do adorn the gospel, it is through our words that God promises to work. And finally, we witness by the PROVIDENCE of God the Father. Through his ordinary means, churches are established and expanded unto the very ends of the earth.

With only three sermons, much was left unsaid. We did not get down in the weeds on each point, nor did we reflect on what ministries might not fit into any of these categories at all. But I trust that God led us to the heart of each theme and thus to the heart of our mission together as a church.

One final thought: we can get every detail of our mission correct and in the right order, but without the blessing of God, it is all for naught. We can work on improving the vessel, but without the Holy Spirit, the vessel will remain empty. So, join me in praying for God to bless and work mightily in our midst, for as Solomon once said, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” (Psalm 127:1).

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



In January, we started a new sermon series in 1 Peter, a wonderful and encouraging little book of hope and perseverance. After spending a year in the mountains and valleys of Isaiah, Peter is re-teaching me how to stop and smell the roses. While Isaiah spoke and wrote in vast images, Peter spoke in specific words and phrases, with every preposition and conjunction chock full of meaning. It has been refreshing, to say the least. And I know that I am not alone – one member commented how Isaiah was hard to understand, but Peter is speaking directly to them in their current situation. And while I know Isaiah spoke to us as well, I get it. To bridge the gap from Isaiah to today, we must work through the various layers of redemptive history from the Promised Land through the exile and return, to Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, and then the pouring out of

the Spirit at Pentecost and the establishment of the early church. Whew, those are a lot of steps from the original audience to the modern audience! So even though Peter still wrote two thousand years ago, when it comes to redemptive history we are in the same moment: trusting in our resurrected savior, living in the church in exile, and awaiting the return of Jesus and the fulfillment of our living hope.

Additionally, after so many warnings and rebukes in Isaiah, it is nice to spend a few months with Peter’s words of hope and encouragement. In the opening chapter, Peter takes us to the mountaintops of our glorious theology and then roots those truths deep in our souls that they might bear the fruit of hope, joy, and perseverance. Far from a dry theological lecture, Peter’s words open wide the treasure house of heaven that we might behold our inheritance – in all its glory and security. With such a rich and secure hope, we of all people can endure the various trials of life – and even endure them with love.

As we get into the meat of this book, I want us to hold fast to the hope of the opening chapter because we are going to be challenged in how we live. As exiles in a foreign land, we live by the code of our homeland, and this will inevitably provoke challenges and hardships among our neighbors. We will be tempted to shrink back, but we must take a firm grasp of our hope and press onward. Our faith is more precious than gold that perishes, and God will guard us unto the day of our salvation, so persevere in the hope that is kept for you in glory.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
March 2	1 Peter 2:1-3	
March 9	1 Peter 2:4-10	1 Kings 4:1-34
March 16	1 Peter 2:11-17	1 Kings 5:1-18
March 23	1 Peter 2:18-25	1 Kings Ch 6, 7
March 30	1 Peter 3:1-7	1 Kings 7:1-12
April 6	1 Peter 3:8-12	
April 13	1 Peter 3:13-17	1 Kings 8:1-21
April 20	1 Peter 3:18-22	
April 27	1 Peter 4:1-6	1 Kings 8:22-53

The Free Offer of the Gospel

By Rev. Jim Curtis

Recently in our Sunday school series on Union with Christ, we considered Effectual Calling. Specifically, David quoted the Shorter Catechism’s definition in Q. 31: *Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.*

As the lesson went on, I confess my mind wandered about that last phrase: *freely offered to us in the gospel*. What does this mean? And how important is it, really?

As most of you may know, I have taken to reading a lot of Scottish church history recently, and it turns out that how we answer this question is vital not just for our evangelism, but also for our view of ourselves, sin, others, and ultimately Christ himself.

What, then, is the Free Offer? That is not a trick question; the answer is in the name. Jesus Christ offers himself to sinners freely in the Gospel. That means there are no conditions in order for a sinner to approach the Savior. Now, don’t let that obviousness cause your mind to wander off—consider the implications of the Free Offer.

This means that the Gospel does *not* teach that you must repent of your sins before you come to Jesus. In other words, the Goodness of the News of the Gospel is that you do not need to be cleansed of your sins before coming to Jesus to be cleansed of sin. No, indeed! Jesus dissuades us of this himself in Mark 2:17 – “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Now consider the impact: have you ever sinned and then thought something like, “I can’t go to God in prayer; I just sinned!”? We are prone to make worthiness a condition in our approach to God in prayer. Have you perhaps had a similar thought prior to the Lord’s Supper? Or, even in trying to decide to come to church at all?

But see how the Free Offer of the Gospel ministers to us in such moments of self-loathing. It reminds us that the only right we have to come to Christ is not our worthiness, cleanliness, nor righteousness (as if we had any!); no, the only right anyone has is simply that Christ freely invited you to come. The Scottish pastor Thomas Boston said it this way: “Even as when one presents a piece of gold to a poor man, saying, ‘Take it, it is yours;’ the offer makes the piece *really* his.”

But what about predestination? Of course, this was and remains an objection to the Free Offer. But recall that famous maxim, “God ordains the ends as well as the means.” That is to say, God ordains the salvation of the elect, yes, but he also sovereignly ordains the means of that end. And what are the means? Christ’s free offer to you that he will do it all, even send the Spirit to persuade and enable you to embrace Jesus Christ.

The Christian Life—Book Review

By Micaiah Liner

“From the greatest theologians, martyrs and intellectually gifted preachers, to those of the lowliest gifts but spiritual power, all, perhaps without exception, have been students of the doctrines of the Bible...” (The Christian Life)

Since the earliest days of Christianity, there has been a need to safeguard the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, one of his chief goals was to encourage the early Church that justification truly comes through faith in Christ alone—nothing else is needed. Apparently, even in the first century Church there was a need to return to core Christian doctrines. Of this Paul writes, *“To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you (Phil 3:1).”* If this was true for the early Church, it is certainly true for us today.

But a regular study of core Christian doctrines does more than protect us from error and false teaching. These doctrines make up the very foundation upon which the life of a Christian is to be built and enjoyed. When we take time to consider these truths, we are reminded that the triune God we serve is indeed wonderful. We are reminded of who we are—and who he is. As a result, our worship is more joy-filled, our prayers are more heartfelt, and our love for Jesus, our Savior, deepens.

In his book *The Christian Life*, Sinclair Ferguson masterfully reveals the beauty of the doctrines of the Christian faith. He does this in eighteen brief, easy-to-read chapters. And while he deems it “A Doctrinal Introduction,” it could just as rightly have been called “A Doctrinal Refresher.” Ferguson’s exploration of doctrines such as Justification, Election, Perseverance, and Glorification are in no way watered down or shallow. However, rather than an exhaustive study, he simply identifies a few essential elements of each doctrine, draws out rich meaning, and then gives his reader the opportunity to reflect on these glorious biblical truths.

This is the kind of book to which, upon reading, you will find yourself returning. As Ferguson writes of these doctrines, “Far from being luxuries, they are necessities.” Seasoned saints will benefit from the intentional and concise approach, as it effectively reminds the reader of how central God’s activity is in every part of the Christian experience. Those new to Christianity will be encouraged as they begin to see the many colors and brush strokes which make up the tapestry of God’s love for his people. It is worth mentioning, that in our most recent Sunday School series, Union with Christ, we have often quoted observations made by Ferguson in *The Christian Life*—his ability to bring clarity to oftentimes challenging topics makes him an invaluable resource.

Consider reading *The Christian Life* as a way of reacquainting yourself with, and delighting yourself in, those core doctrines which make up the foundation of our Christian faith. Copies can be found on the church book table.