

## “What now?”

Questions I am asking my self in this post Covid world.

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The following thoughts are humbly presented with the assistance of many other pastors and leaders whom I have spoken with, and gleanings from a significant amount of webinars I have attended, and mostly to my own leanings as to what God has exposed in my leadership during these challenging times.

We are all sailing in the same waters but in different boats.

As we look over the harbor and are ready to head out, we look down and see the tide has receded, and exposed the ocean floor. It is not pretty. The bottom, laid bare, is populated with weeds, garbage, car tires, batteries, assorted detritus, and other unsightly flotsam and jetsam. It is what has always been there under the surface - things we would rather not set our eyes on.

The outgoing tide championed by Covid has laid bare a plethora of preexisting conditions - a lack of soul care amongst our people, the shallowness of our discipleship, our disconnectedness from one another, and a dislocation of our mission from our contextual neighborhoods.

For many of us as pastors and people it has been a nightmare for those who have regrets about what it says about the quality and effectiveness of our ministry and our secret inner desires to see authentic growth and depth of faith in the communities we serve.

### Four areas of exposure

#### 1. Sunday-centric vs. Christo-centric thinking.

There is enormous pressure placed upon us, and coming from within, to resurrect some sort of credible Sunday worship experience. We have all become televangelists! - A role we never dreamed of when we began ministry. The tug to return to something resembling “normal” is a huge temptation and pulls at our natural bent toward whatever is comfortable and perhaps even traditional. Have we relied on that enticement to be our central marker for success and effectiveness in the past? - YES. Will we learn that this is a dangerous supposition? The fact is, a third of our people are likely never coming back. It has exposed the paucity of our slant toward performance values and our penchant for entertainment culture that has been subtly embedded in the church and copied from the world.

#### 2. Discipleship

Could it be that the only way to truly deal with the shallowness we have had exposed, is to draw closer to Jesus with a robust, intentional, direct, definable and effective posture toward the self-feeding of believers to grow in their faith? The call is toward a more Christocentric focus about what Jesus is doing amongst us - and joining him there. A stunning realization is

that so many pastors have to admit that we do not have a purposeful and deliberate discipleship model functioning in our communities. We have not done this well and it is showing in glaring ways. Is this the time for a bona fide, thoughtful, “rule of life” or its equivalent which would be operable and thriving in a more localized community of accountability to help our people grow?

### 3. Pastoral Care

For many of us as in ministry leadership, we have not seen most of our people for a year and a half. After a flurry of phone trees and contacts with people in the early months, it has tapering down to a trickle as we entered summer, then a reset in the fall, a hard cold winter, and then the third wave - which arguably buried some of us in lethargy. We have lost touch with people who have found other pursuits and ways of filling their lives. The breakdown of relationships, built previously on regular patterns of meeting together, cups of coffee and incremental contact, has reached crisis proportions as we grow more and more distant. Some of us can even be accused of “helicopter pastoring” - floating sometimes over the people we serve, only touching a few of the more gregarious folks but now realizing the nature of our fellowship and people caring for one another has been quite superficial. Can we recover the body of Christ ministering to itself and teaching our folk to shepherd?

### 4. Reconnection with our Neighborhood

As the Covid experience has acted to literally atomize us into smaller and smaller units of contact with people, it has drawn us unwittingly back to our local neighbourhoods and places of residence. Has this moved us to rethink our missional calling and reinvent a more “parish” model of localized contact with those we bump up with in our own geographical context? Has it challenged the “attraction” model that sometimes rules our gatherings and dispersed us to rethink backyard BBQ’s and contacts with our own neighbors? These ministries of proximity are surfacing all around us. Who is in our orbit? Have we existed with a contractual model of what we can offer in return for ones attendance in our place of worship to a more covenantal sharing of our lives through mutual edification and expressions of love?

Crisis gives way to renewal. That is the pattern of church history from the earliest days of the church. The great leadership challenge is guiding our people through this period and not letting the moment be lost in attempting a return to standard practice. Can we begin by listening to peoples stories about how they are navigating these times? Are we able to enter in and listen to what people are saying about what Jesus is speaking into their lives? Can we turn the dialogue into a genuine call to hear God’s voice speaking, not through our pontification and analysis alone but what God is revealing to his people? Remember what Peter Drucker has prophetically said - “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

The stunning reality of John 21 was the fact of the disciples, no doubt disoriented and experiencing massive change, going back to doing what they did best - fishing. Returning back to what they knew. Unfortunately, there was not much going on, and no fish being caught that day. Things changed dramatically as Jesus (who they did not recognize at first) gave them new instructions on where to cast their nets. His presence filled their nets and they rushed ashore to be served a hot meal that Jesus has preparing for them. Renewal, revived passion, Peter running from the boat to the shore. What followed was a recommissioning, a renewed “sent-out-ness” into an unknown future but in the presence of the living Christ.

Our people have already crossed over. Covid has seen to that.