

Evolving Church Conference

Saturday, April 8, 2006

Chris Seay - Main Session #1

All of us as believers are tellers of the story. It's difficult to do if we don't live in and understand the story.

Stories have a way of ruling our lives. Example: my Pappy, a truck driver with one arm. When I figured out his story, it made a lot more sense of my family and of me.

Most of you are living differently than you're identity. We need to find and live our identity from our story. We get the privilege of being collaborators with God and his work.

We often get our identity as consumers. Example: what they told us after 9/11 - go buy something. The primary threat to Christianity is not atheism or Satanism, but consumerism. The church has bought into consumption: instead of challenging it, we treat people as consumers, and the church becomes a vendor of religious goods and services.

We are not consumers. We are conceivers giving birth to Christ where we are. We have lost our way. We need to understand what true beauty is. We are artists bringing beauty into existence. Beauty isn't to be consumed, it's to be engaged.

Brueggemann in [The Prophetic Imagination](#): we paint a picture of the world as it is, and a picture of the world as it should be, and we invite people into that world. We fail to do both tasks. We often paint worlds that have never existed: Kinkade, our Biblical stories. Example: Abraham pimping his wife - we make Abraham the hero, not God. Tell the real story, and people want to hear them, and the Gospel becomes beautiful.

We need to tell stories that are real. All of us are capable of telling these stories. All of us have a story to tell, and our story connects with God's story.

I have a metaphor from [Walk the Line](#): Cash auditions with old Gospel songs. Sam Phillips, the producer tells him he doesn't buy it. He is regurgitating someone else's story and it's not real. The world is changed because Sam Phillips tells him to start telling real stories. "We've already heard that song a hundred times, just like that...If you could sing one song, would you sing that song or would you sing something different, something real." What happened to Johnny Cash is that he became a truth-teller.

I hope I can be a Sam Phillips to tell you. *Whatever sermon you re working on, or song you re writing, if it s not the sermon you would teach or the song you would write if you were about to die and only had one message left, then tear it up and say something real.*

We don't have to choose between love and truth. You're not loving if you're not telling the truth.

People are scared of telling their stories. They think if they tell some things, then nobody could love them. Every time you tell this part of this story, you can physically watch people get closer.

Sam Wineburg, a historian at Stanford, wrote [*Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*](#). He writes about the unnatural way we teach history. We've come up with standard propositions that need to be taught. People learn the propositions long enough to pass a test, but then forget them. But we are made for story. The story is the pegboard that allows the propositions to have a place to fit.

Orthodox Christianity is the exact same. We've developed the most important facts that people need to know, but we're communicating them to people who have no sense of story. Without a story, they forget and abandon the proposition because they have no context.

Rice or water that is blessed is different. We are skeptical, but words and blessings have power. (Film: [*What the Bleep Do We Know?*](#) - Book - *Listening to Water*)

We are gnostics. We are concerned about truth, rightfully so, because truth and doctrine is important. But we are already in trouble in the evangelical church: we have bought into gnosticism, thinking there is a secular world and a spiritual world. But there is no difference.

taylormali.com - [totally like whatever, you know](#)

I challenge you to speak with conviction. It's not enough to question authority. You've got to speak it too. Live out the Gospel well.

Q&A

Power is not in consumerism. People come into our churches as consumers. Bad question: How do we meet people's felt needs. What we want is more. That's the story of Eden, Israel, Ecclesiastes - it's not enough and we want more. we are worse: we have more than ever before, but we want more.

What we say at our church: I don't give a damn about your felt needs. I care about your real needs. those are to love your God and love your neighbor. if you do that, something will be birthed in you that will last longer.

Our call: to abandon the business of consumerism; to collaborate with God - creating and enhancing beauty.

Brian McLaren - Workshop #1

We've been through a period of transition. We're starting to see the way forward is to rediscover the message and priorities of Jesus.

Often we think Jesus came to die. But according to Jesus, it was more. He came preaching. When the Gospels talk about Jesus coming to save the lost, I think in context he's talking about Israel, and only secondarily about individuals.

Jesus comes along after John. John has been baptizing people. Baptism were common in the temple. What was radical about John is that he baptized out of the official religious system.

There is a fascinating choreography between Jesus' life and John's. John is imprisoned, and Jesus begins teaching. And he preaches the kingdom of God. If the king imprisons the person who is preaching, then I will announce an alternate kingdom.

Too few people realize the radical nature of the message of the kingdom of God. Many think it means heaven after you die. Why do Mark and Luke say Kingdom of God, but Matthew says Kingdom of Heaven? Why does John hardly ever say Kingdom at all? (John loves to use eternal life instead). People think it's about heaven=eternal life.

But there is a deeper reason why Matthew uses Kingdom of Heaven. It's the most Jewish gospel. Matthew follows the Jewish reticence about using the name of God directly. Heaven substitutes for God. As well, it's setting up an alternate kingdom to Herod's, headquartered in heaven.

Why would John use different terms? It's clear that it's not about what happens after you die, from the Lord's prayer. The Lord's Prayer says the opposite. Same with the book of Revelation. It ends with an image of a New Jerusalem coming to earth.

Eternal life doesn't simply mean life in heaven after you die, contrary to popular opinion. Eternal life is defined by Jesus clearly in John 17:3 - it's knowing God. The word eternal is also a problem: means of the ages. Rich young ruler: I have life in the present regime. How do I have life also in the ages?

To know means to live in an interactive relationship. The kingdom of God is life lived in a network of interactive relationships: with God as King, with other citizens, with the territory or land, with other kingdoms.

Jesus says, "The time has come! The kingdom has come near! Repent and believe the good news!" You don't have to wait for the future. You can enter and seize and experience right now.

Jesus says, "The time has come. You can live a life in a new dimension, a new way. That means you should repent, which means rethink everything, and believe the good news. You don't have to wait; in fact, you can't wait." What would it mean to rethink everything?

In the Gospels, it's not repent and accept this theory of the atonement. It's repent and believe me.

This is as disruptive word today as back then. Maybe if Jesus said this today, he would get crucified too, and by the religious establishment. How do you respond? Curiosity? Cynicism? Interest? Hope?

e.g. South Africa: they had to repent and rethink everything. It's only been 16 years. They're still rethinking, and it makes them the most advanced nation in the world. We call rethinking flip-flopping.

Imagine fishing on the lake, and Jesus asks you in light of the kingdom to change everything and follow him. Believe him enough to follow him and begin re-arranging our lives.

Q&A

What does it look like to bring the Kingdom to a neighborhood? Interesting - you never read expand or grow the Kingdom. See, receive, enter the Kingdom takes. We don't bring the Kingdom. We receive it in a neighborhood. In Jesus' time, it looked like parties; opening the table to people who were excluded before.

You personally receive the Kingdom, but it's not about your personal life. It's for the purpose that the Kingdom comes on earth.

How does this affect our view of evangelism? The word evangelism is not a biblical word. Jesus uses the term making disciples of the kingdom: people who learn to live in the ways of the kingdom. It's about moving away from signing the paper, to helping people from becoming disciples of the kingdom of God.

How? Form disciples; through spiritual formation.

What Jesus unleashed is the activity of the Spirit in the world, not just the church. When the Temple curtain is torn, it's not only so we have access. It's that God is on the move in the world.

A kingdom view of consumerism: not that it values material possessions too much. It doesn't value them enough. Its focus is not what we have, but on how much more we need to have.

The good news wasn't just good news 2,000 years ago. It's still good news and new news. We have new situations in which to envision the kingdom.

This will create a lot of problems for you. We don't have to be angry at anyone to live this. As Yancey said, of all the people who lived, Jesus seemed to have the least messianic complex. There's about fullness of time, not reach the world by 39 AD.

What about life after death? If you are in a situation that is preoccupied with life after death, it is possible to swing to the other side and care only about life on this earth. Example: for Tutu 30 years ago, believing that life is only what's here would paralyze. The

real test of whether we get the Kingdom is what type of risks we take. The early believers were willing to risk their lives.

The Kingdom won't come without a lot of people being willing to suffer. Other kingdoms come by others shedding their blood. The Kingdom of God comes by the King shedding his blood.

What about orthodoxy? If the message of this Kingdom is half true, then our idea of orthodoxy needs some work. We need a corrigible orthodoxy, *semper reforma*. We need something more than just the two extremes of absolutism and relativism.

What stops us from spontaneous expressions of the kingdom, like parties in neighborhoods? Partly our theology: that we think it should happen in church. Partly also that life happens and is busy.

I worry that Christianity will imitate fundamentalist Islam. I would not be proud to be part of a religion that protests cartoons but not the treatment of women or poverty. I'm worried this is happening to Christians to.

We believe God revealed himself by being spat upon and humbled. Is Jesus humble enough to work anonymous and incognito at times? e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous. Take the 12 steps and Methodism, and you have some of the best insights into spiritual formation from the Protestant movement. Jesus is willing to go incognito when necessary.

We can sometimes be like the corporate sponsor who says, "We don't want to do anything without saying, 'This message is brought to you by...'"

Don Miller - Main Session #2

Commercialization makes it hard, if not impossible, for us to understand the Gospel. For instance, we don't buy dish soap. In America it's marketed as something that is a miracle for your dishes, that will make you skinny and make people want to have sex with you.

We've all heard, "There is a hole in your heart that we try to fill, which only Jesus can fill." That is not true. That is a translation of a consumer market pitch. There is something in your life that is incomplete. If you will buy this, your life will be complete.

The call of Jesus was not to a more attractive life. The call was to die, be tortured, to suffer. Yet we sell Jesus as the ultimate pill. And the reality is: it isn't happening for you. At best, looking at our lives, we would have to say that Jesus is a mediocre product. He isn't this product that is going to fulfill us.

The tension is that we thought Jesus said he would be a good product. He never did. He said that our homes would be divided. He said his yoke would be easy; what was he saying? That we don't need all of our stuff.

We give messages that are about how Jesus can benefit your life. We have a free market translation of Scriptural ideas. If we do this, we present a cheapened version of what God is presenting. We are also presenting a law.

The Bible does have impact on how we live, but it is not a how-to guide. We live in a how culture. The dominant questions are how. The Bible is not a how book. It is not interested almost at all about how questions. It is more interested in why questions.

We live in a culture that says, "Don't tell me why, tell me how."

Example: In Matthew 6, he says to the Jews, "You used to make a big show of your religion." They use prayer as a genie in a lamp: they think if you pray a certain way, God will answer. It's wish fulfillment and voodoo. You have to make stuff up, but it sells.

The Bible has this message for our culture: When you are done with wish fulfillment, when you are done thinking there is some easy way, when you are done trying to get God to jump through your hoops, and you're ready to embrace reality: come to me.

The beauty of the text is that it is not a sales pitch at all. If I was God and wanted to communicate my love for people, I'd skip the part about killing babies. But God presents reality and doesn't soft-sell it.

It's like loving your wife: you justify your experiences cognitively, but it's mystical. You explain why you love your wife, but they're not the real reasons. If somebody came along who was more loving, more beautiful, you wouldn't love her more.

Jesus says, "Stop it and don't relate to God this way anymore." None of this is method is relational. We end up trying to control God. It's like [The Stepford Wives](#). We need to get to the point where we want God even though he can't be controlled by us.

Stop role-playing with God. Most of us, myself included, have no idea who we are.

"Just be with God as simply and honestly as you know how" - What would happen to your churches if you became that sort of person? Example: at my church, we're in this building project, and the guy who is managing it admitted that he didn't know what he was doing. Imagine being honest with your congregation. You'd be attacked, by the way. I don't recommend it, but Jesus does.

"The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace."

The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. (Matthew 6:7-9 The Message)

What if Jesus was saying, "Stop making it (the Lord's Prayer) so technical. I tried my best to be as elusive as possible." What if he was saying, "Guys, I want you to pray simply. Here's how to relate to God."

"Don, you didn't check out all your options. You didn't look into Buddhism."

Christianity is not fundamentally a religious and philosophical system. It's relational. Relationships by their nature are exclusive relationships.

You don't have to check out all other women before you marry your wife.

This message is the opposite of the free market Gospel. I am agreeing to go into comfort because I am going into something I don't feel I need because God thinks I do.

I grew up without a father. When I lived with John MacMurray, it seemed strange: an extra guy around and the washer didn't need fixing. I learned what a father does. His daughter learned when she was almost three some pretty important things: loving authority doesn't always give you what you want. "I know what you need; you don't; and I will father you into maturity."

When we break away from the free market Gospel and rediscover God in relationship, everything becomes spiritual.

Brian Walsh - Workshop #2

Why are you here? 72 year old man - I'm here because we all have kids who all believe in Jesus but don't want anything to do with the church. We are spending Sunday morning at the expense of the world and the poor.

Walsh - If we aren't giving at least twice as much to the poor as we do to our RRSP, then we're saving for our future when people don't have a present.

Isaiah 65 will be our text. What does this vision of life mean for the emerging church for our call and identity?

That is a vision of a renewed city in the rubble of Jerusalem. This vision becomes a vision not just for Jerusalem but for any city. Jerusalem becomes the model for any city that is looking for shalom.

This vision is rooted in the restoration of all creation (the Kingdom of God). Not a vision of heavenly bliss or escaping reality.

Can we imagine a life of such sustainability? We need night vision, waiting for a new dawn.

I sense in the emerging conversation a renewal of the presence of God. There's a shift in our thinking. That's where Isaiah ends.

If this is true, then when do our cities become cities of delight? What happens when God's presence transforms our communities.

The emerging conversation is relational. How broad do those relationships go?

To be Christian is to shape culture. We know we are culturally shaped, and that gives us some humility in seeing how our own Christianity (even in the emerging church) is culturally shaped.

You don't clientize the poor; they are your community, not your clients. You don't speak for them; you let them speak.

Mixed rental markets in social housing - huge waiting lists for Rent-Geared-to-Income units; nobody wants to move into a rental unit. Would hope that Christians might choose to move in to these neighborhoods.

The strength of the mainline church is its concern for social justice. The weakness is that because they recognize the structural elements of sin, they think if we fix these we will address the problem. We need the presence of God.

There is not one verse in Scripture that teaches that the eternal destiny is to live with Jesus in heaven. It's that we'll be resurrected to live in a new earth. If our eschatology is that we'll abandon this world and go to heaven, it affects how we live today.

You're postmodern if you look at the atom bomb and think it's more than a blip; that you can't shrug it off. It's a turn away from propositionalism to a relational approach. We argue that postmodernism doesn't go far enough.

Brian McLaren - Main Session #3

Emerging Missional Churches

I really don't care about the term, but something is going on. None of us are interested in being part of a fad that divides Christians from Christians. We've seen the trends and we're tired of all the fads, or even of talking about emerging churches.

Gibbs and Bolger talked about [Emerging Churches](#), not the Emerging Church. That is a smart way to put it. There is something happening, but it's not one type of thing.

Nine characteristics:

1. Recentring the gospel on Christ and the Kingdom of God (rest flow out of this)
2. Engaging culture without a sacred-secular dualism
3. Doing life together in 24/7 community (communal approach)
4. Listening with openness, including the outsider
5. Serving those in need without ulterior motive (serve because it's right)
6. Involving participants in worship
7. Valuing creativity in the image of the Creator
8. Leading through networks, not hierarchies
9. Integrating ancient and avant garde in spiritual formation

There are three ways to think of the emerging missional church (or the church that is emerging): as a center, a fringe, and as a range.

Four types of churches: liturgical, social action, evangelical, charismatic. We can retreat into our corners, or migrate to the middle and learn from the other streams/traditions. This expresses some of what is happening.

OR that we live in at least three worlds: pre-modern world (e.g. fundamentalist Islam), modern world (Wall Street, Hollywood), and an emerging world (Europe, many places in Canada). In one day, you can be in three different worlds, and talk to people who would have a hard time talking to one another.

A church that is rising in the aftermath of

- the rise of the religious right
- the collapse of the secular left
- the end of apartheid
- Sept. 11 and the resurgence of nationalism
- the rise of consumerism and theocapitalism (capitalism that is seen as a God-given right)
- the internet and virtual reality
- religious broadcasting
- absolutism and relativism
- AIDS and global climate change

OR old paradigm -> early transition -> late transition -> new paradigm / the churches we now -> churches that are emerging -> churches of tomorrow (that don't exist yet) - these are all churches we love and respect; we must not create us/them speaking.

OR range - deep ecclesiology that looks at the church in all its forms to the most hierarchical and traditional to low church and unstructured. It acknowledges and honors the church in all its forms. Example: story of a Roman Catholic priest endorsing a woman running a house church without her knowing it. What makes you care about all of these expressions is if you care about both evangelism and social justice.

OR pie chart with reformed, baptist, catholic, pentecostal - emerging church a new piece of the pie. I hope this is not what we are talking about. Maybe it's a new ring around the tree. It's the ring that is dealing most with the environment of today. That ring has most in common with those of other traditions doing the same.

Apartheid Museum - six value statements of the new South Africa, such as freedom, respect, responsibility, democracy. When it was going through its transition from its old paradigm to a new one, they had opportunity to decide on what values they would embrace. It's something to be able to start here (at the museum) and end there (with freedom, respect). Don't wait for someone else to do the hard work.

Christian communities in Canada, as well as communities around the world, will play a key role in deciding these values.

"What will the church look like in the future?" "It depends on us." "No, God." "No, I'm not worried about the God side of the equation. The part that's in question is us."

Easter calls us to experience the confusion and discouragement of the disciples in Holy Week. Easter looks at me at my most discouraged moments and asks, "Do you want to give up on Saturday?"

Q&A

Don Miller, Craig Carter (from Tyndale), Brian McLaren

How do you challenge those who are comfortable with church as it is?

Miller - We're surrounding ourselves with people who agree with us. What about going so far into hostile territory that nobody comes back alive? We made a list of values of God toward the world, and started helping organizations that shared these values that aren't even Christian. He also gave us permission to fail.

Carter - Make it a theological issue. It's an issue of ecclesiology.

Could you discuss the Kingdom focus and social justice?

McLaren - We need to start with our employment. Maybe don't add another program. If you have lawyers in your church or engineers, let them work for social justice within their careers. As a leader, set an example. Open your heart and let people see what you care about. We all can't care about everything, but there are plenty of needs to go around.

Is there a unique role for Christians to receive the Kingdom of God?

McLaren - This is the important part of focusing on the message of the Kingdom. This is Jesus' thing. Nobody else is talking about the Kingdom of God.

Principalities and powers - regimes. How does the Kingdom of God confront these other structures and regimes? Not all the kingdoms of this world are over, but they will be won into the Kingdom of God. Does the Kingdom of God blow things up or preserve and redeem them?

Carter - Kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of God. These principalities and powers were created good and are part of what will be redeemed. When we think of inter-religious dialogue and our relation to culture, maybe the church is where people live in the tension of the in-between world. When that tension relaxes (too comfortable with the world or too close to thinking we've arrived) we should worry.

Is there a role for institutions still?

McLaren - No, I'm not down on institutions still. There is a value to a community that lasts eight weeks, but there's also value to communities that have lasted eight centuries.

How do you process the difference between the Kingdom and the world at a local church level?

McLaren - Do we have a church that has a mission, or do we have a mission that has a church? Is the church really the point?

It's interesting they chose the word ecclesia - it's an assembly of people who meet to concern themselves with the affairs of the Kingdom.

I am a postmodern guy. I connect with what you're saying and I want my church to go there. But when it comes time for my church to make decisions, I clash against a modern mindset. I feel like it's a lose-lose proposition. If I struggle, it seems like I'm losing. If I leave, it feels like I'm leaving. What to do?

Miller - I chose to leave. I felt like I needed to. My mistake was that I didn't speak the truth in love. When asked why I don't go to the main service anymore, I said, "Because it makes me angry." I wish I had the same patience as I do with people who aren't believers.

A couple of assumptions that might not be right: that I am right, which may not be true, and that they have the same mindset. I wish I could have introduced them to people who think differently and to Scriptures that are being ignored. Spend a lot of time affirming someone's existence before bringing in your own idea.

How to cope and survive in the transition?

McLaren - Survival is underrated. Sometimes it's heroic just to survive. My crisis of struggling with these questions brought me to a 3-4 year period in which I felt worse every month than the one before. I was losing confidence in my theology, but I only realized I wasn't losing my confidence in God until later. I didn't see the difference.

There's a difference between first-order practice and second-order practices. One is to pray; the second is to understand why. We need both. But when we sacrifice our second-order stuff, we can hold on to the first-order. When I had questions about prayer, for instance, I still prayed about it.

Don't let yourself drift from your first-order practices. One of them is to have a soul friend or spiritual director: someone to whom you can pour out your life without fear of being rejected or fixed.

The only way evangelicals to move forward with the emerging church is to drop the idea that we're right. Is that true?

McLaren - Evangelicals are right about a lot of things. But nobody is right about everything. The term evangelical is no longer a pristine word because of what has happened politically; it's become a sociological descriptor of a voting block.

What I sense from some of my evangelical friends is that if we unbolt some of what they are doing, we are opening the doors to the world getting worse, and we are the only ones holding it. They feel betrayed by me. I feel bad and understand, but I can't live in that world anymore and that causes me sadness.

Carter - I grew up evangelical and feared reading books and losing my faith. We evangelicals have the problem of misplaced certainty. We've placed it in our theology, which is historically conditioned. Our theology is different from Anselm, etc. We think our theology will save the world. Our theology and Jesus are not the same thing. We need some critical distance from our theology.

You've said our market language cheapens the Gospel. What language do we then use to share the Gospel?

Miller - Biblical language. I don't think you can translate the relational language of Scripture using free market images. The Gospel being preached in a free market economy is a false Gospel. Would you like to know Christ? Do you know you have a Father in heaven who loves you? Not four principles. You can know Christ and be a heretic. My friend was a pluralist for a few years and a Christian. I was eight when I became a Christian and I believed in unicorns.

How do we incorporate the arts in worship?

Miller - Part of the relational dynamic is to understand that some things exist that can only be reported artistically. We need more than truth. We need truth that is meaningful. (e.g. to girlfriend: you are 5'6", you have brown hair - that is true but it is not meaningful to communicate love. Meaning is true but also deals with the heart.)

Film: *Most*. Why do people emote to that DVD but not to the Gospel?

If the Gospel isn't about better lives, how do you explain John 10:10?

Miller - It's true we need Christ and he meets our needs, but not all now.

Concerns have been expressed about doctrine in the emerging church. Do you see this? How serious are they? What do we do?

McLaren: There is so much doctrinal diversity in the church in general, and even within the term evangelical (the difference between a Mennonite and a five point Calvinist). Whatever the emerging church is, there is at least that much diversity in evangelicalism.

Is there a danger? Of course. But for those evangelicals who express concern: the emerging church is small, but there is not as much concern about other areas, such as being willing to go to war against Islam, or that we have bought into consumer gospels?

Carter: There is some overreaction of criticism. Imagine a family in which one kid has run away. Years later, another child wants to go to a party. The parents would overreact, and it's understandable. The evangelical church is like that. We've had part of our group become liberal a hundred years ago and become radically liberal. This happened in our family, and we tend to overreact now.

I get frustrated with evangelical gatekeepers who condemn so easily, but we may as well face the fact that we are a dysfunctional family. It is possible for a Christian move-

ment to go liberal and cease to be Christian. It is a danger. We need to take the possibility seriously.

We've been talking about the Spirit's work in the world. How can we discern that work, and avoid confusing our own sociopolitical agendas with that work?

McLaren - The Bible is pretty important. Need to read all of it, not just the parts that make us comfortable. We also need to dialogue with each other, with other Christians who see things differently. Also when we read each other's books. It's a great side-effect of mission trips.

I'm in the middle of reading [Bird by Bird](#). Writing plays an important role in this conversation. Why are you compelled to write?

Miller - Rent is a big part of it. Anne gave us permission for crappy first drafts. I don't elevate the importance of my work beyond what it is: memoir or funny essays. It's a creative process and I would die if I didn't do it. Rembrandt painted himself so much because he couldn't afford a model, but he had to paint. It's also what compelled God to create the cosmos. When you do write well, you have a sense of God's pleasure.

Carter - Compel is the right word. There are lots of excuses for not writing, and writing is not easy. If nothing compels you, it won't get done. I feel a responsibility to say something that isn't being said in the conversation. I used to think it's arrogant to say because of the number of books being written. But in every generation, that generation has to articulate the faith. It has to be redone in every generation.