

Lutheran Mission Matters

Winner of
Concordia Historical Institute's
2017 Award of Commendation



Volume XXVI, No. 2 (Issue 53) November 2018

Preaching and the Mission of God

Richard Gahl

Abstract: Declining church membership is getting more attention these days. While it is not a new concern, proposed solutions result in modest increases in some congregations; but, in general, widespread decline continues. No one silver bullet is likely to fix what ails us. The work of changing a congregation's culture takes time and a commitment for the long haul in days when instant fixes are expected.

This article raises one aspect of church life in the theology and practice of mission that doesn't get much press: missional preaching. In other words, in addition to telling the story of the Good News in Jesus Christ, we propose to ask what the writers of the New Testament were calling on the emerging church to do with the Good News. What clues about the mission of the Church are embedded in the New Testament documents? How might those mission insights empower preaching in this twenty-first century AD? My thesis is that preachers need to refer more frequently to the mission of God and illustrate what it means from Scripture for the baptized people of God.

Biography as Confession and Illustration

Permit me to use embarrassing personal biography to illustrate how long it took for me to "get it"—over forty years to recognize that the mission of God is the purpose of the Church in every time and in every place. If the people of God are to be released for God's mission, then preachers will need to be more forthright about the mission of the congregation in sermons and bible studies. It simply will not happen by osmosis.

When I was growing up, mission appeared to be in far distant places. There is a specific memory of Sunday lunch in the parsonage with a missionary from Nigeria who told the story of mission in an exotic place, huge pythons blocking the dirt road



Rev. Richard Gahl retired in 2005 and continues to live in Westlake, Ohio. The 47-page manual for church planters referenced in this article soon expanded into the Congregational Stewardship Workbook published in 1993 and was revised to form the Congregational Stewardship Workbook 2000. Both of these were the result of collaboration with Dave Hoover. They were joined by national stewardship staff in the writing and editing process for additional materials gathered from across the LCMS. rgahl@aol.com

Copyright 2018 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 26, no. 2 (2018) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.html>.

E-mail lsfmissiology@gmail.com to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

in the jungle. Of course, we sang “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains.” Mission was not local, but took place in far distant places.

During my vicarage, one assignment was to pull together the Epiphany mission emphasis. That year the national mission education materials focused on South America. The materials again presented a picture of mission taking place in distant lands. It was a “this is how your mission dollars are being invested” experience that had nothing to do with the local *missio Dei* of the congregation.

My seminary placement in 1965 was to two mission fields north of Ft. Wayne, Indiana. In Hometown, a small congregation had been worshiping in a storefront for about a year before my arrival in late July. Organizational work for the Leo-Grabill field began in the fall and led to a first worship service in a Legion Hall on the first Sunday of January 1966. Looking back on that time, I now realize that my operative understanding of mission was to reorganize existing Lutherans from Ft. Wayne into two start-up congregations. After five years, a call came from a congregation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. During that ten-plus-year ministry, the outreach focus was to identify Lutherans who had moved into the community from elsewhere and had not connected with a congregation.

The real mission light bulb began to turn on with the call to serve as Executive Director of the Ohio District in 1981. It happened at what I remember as my first participation in the regular gatherings of district mission execs. The secretary for North American Mission was giving his report when he looked right at me to say “and there are six million unchurched in Ohio.” Ouch! So I checked the Glenmary statistics he was referencing and retorted with a sarcastic: “You are wrong! There are seven million unchurched.”

Now the question became: What to do? We set up a schedule to visit every one of the fifteen district circuits to report the Glenmary data for the mission field in each county of the various circuits. For the record, this Catholic organization connects census data with congregation membership reported to denominational headquarters. Over the years, the data has expanded to include Amish, Bahai, Hindu, Muslim, Non-denominational, and Sikh worshipers. By subtracting reported religious organization membership from actual census data, one gets an “unchurched” or “unclaimed” number. I kept current with the expanding Glenmary data for the 1980, 1990, and 2000 censuses. The Glenmary Home Missioners site leads to all the previous reports, together with 2010 updates.

If the people of God are to be released for God’s mission, then preachers will need to be more forthright about the mission of the congregation in sermons and bible studies. It simply will not happen by osmosis.

For the district, we were able to point to “unconnected” mission fields of 150 to 1,200 individuals for every church, not just Lutheran or even Christian, listed in the county. No matter what the county ratio number turned out to be, there was general surprise. What had been new to me was also new to district pastors. We had never really thought of congregational mission or purpose as intentionally reaching out to unchurched people in the community around the building.

These conversations prompted a number of collaborations between local congregations and the district mission board. On one occasion, the local group got cold feet because they discovered a large number of Christian congregations in the target area. Was a new church really needed? The assignment was given to telephone all area congregations and request their Sunday attendance numbers. With the generous assumption that one-third of membership participated in worship on a given weekend, the local planning team figured out there were some twenty thousand people without a church in the targeted area—a number that gave renewed impetus to a new church start.

The working assumption was simple: All people had a church home, even though they might not attend very often. But the assumption was not based on demonstrable facts.

Eventually, the Ohio District began to talk of all congregations as outposts of God’s mission. But the message had a difficult time getting through. In response to a letter addressing congregations as “mission stations,” one pastor testily replied: We are not a mission congregation! Perhaps the understanding was that mission congregations get financial support from the district. In one sense, this was a common manner of speaking. Mission funds entrusted to the district were dispersed to new congregational starts and to support urban, deaf, and campus ministries. This sentiment—that mission in the local community is not the congregation’s responsibility—is echoed in CNH President Robert Newton’s report in the previous issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* of a faithful congregation leader’s insisting that the United States is not a mission field.¹ The sentiment among LCMS mission leaders, beginning with Ed Westcott in the 1980s, has been forthright: The United States is one of the largest mission fields in the world.

It is probably true that there are many causes for weak, even nonexistent, mission understandings and activities in congregations. Richard Bliese and Craig Gelder surmise that “many Lutherans simply do not have the confidence that their Gospel is good news to the unchurched, the poor, or those on the margins of our neighborhoods.”² Perhaps! Was the sign “No admittance” on the door of the congregation in Ontario symptomatic of a purposeful non-welcoming attitude to newcomers? Possibly. Our prevailing culture is not much help. “What’s in it for me?” is a mantra that focuses on my needs and my desires. We become consumers of

religious experiences, losing track of our vocation as God's people called to His mission.

Since retirement, I have been invited to participate with six to ten clergy in regular Bible study around the Sunday readings. We meet every three weeks, rotating responsibilities for leading presentations for the next three Sundays. In my twenty-five years of district ministry in support of congregations, I had really lost contact with the week-by-week pastoral leadership in worship and preaching on the appointed lectionary readings in the context of the particular congregation. So I had some catching up to do.

We become consumers of religious experiences, losing track of our vocation as God's people called to His mission.

My continuing interest in mission, God's mission—the *missio Dei*—has been one of my intentional contributions to these Bible studies. The many publications of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) that have grown out of the mission theology of Lesslie Newbigin³ inform our conversations.

One post-retirement consultation was the opportunity to put some growing convictions into practice. A small, shrinking congregation approached a larger congregation (the one that hosts the pastors' Bible study), asking for help. One action was to pull together a preaching team of six pastors that would rotate on Sundays, while conversations within the congregation would address matters of the future. My suggestion to the preaching team was to keep in mind a set of common mission concepts to turn light on the purpose of the congregation. Approximately every two months, I would review the lectionary inserts subscription, pull together ideas of mission that I saw in the readings and prayers, and share the results with the preaching team.

An immediate insight was the need to see a particular reading not just in relation to the other Propers for the day, but in the context of the particular Old or New Testament writing. So much of what I had been doing was to look at one particular reading in isolation from the rest of the book of the Bible. The three-year lectionary began to put together consecutive readings from the same book, jumping around a bit to fit the cycle of the church year. But there were significant times when one reading from the current Gospel followed the previous reading and led into the next Sunday. The need for a "wide angle," "view from 30,000 feet" approach was more and more evident.

Getting back to a confessional mode—my purchase of Bible commentaries slacked off dramatically during the district office years. Now it was evident that I needed to get back to some of the seminary-trained methodologies. Each year I began to purchase a newer commentary for the primary Gospel in the three-year

series, work through it cover to cover, and place copious notes into a three-ring binder with the Greek and English texts side by side.

Meanwhile the GOCN people have continued to publish significant material on mission in the biblical writings. It was a delight to learn that since 2002 the GOCN folks have been meeting in conjunction with annual gatherings of the Society for Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion.⁴ The result has been an exhilarating cross fertilization of mission and biblical studies.

The Bible as Mission Text

In his introductory chapter to the superb collection of essays, *Reading the Bible Missionally*, Michael Goheen makes this statement:

The most important legacy of Willingen [International National Missionary Council, Willingen, Germany 1952] was the new concept of God's mission. . . . Mission has its source in the love of the Father, who sent his Son to reconcile all things to himself. The Son sent the Spirit to gather his church together and empower it to participate in his mission. The church is sent by Jesus to continue his mission and this sending defines its very nature. . . . Mission, then, is not merely a set of outreach activities: *it defines the very being of God's people.*⁵

Later in the same volume, he makes this comment about missional preaching:

The Bible is both a *record* and a *tool* of God's mission in and through his people. . . . To recognize that the Bible is a tool used by God to shape his people for their missional vocation is essential to the homiletical task. (italics original)⁶

British New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham shades it differently in his *Bible and Mission, Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*:

The purpose of this book . . . is about how to read the Bible in a way that takes seriously the missionary direction. . . . The Bible is a kind of project aimed at the Kingdom of God, towards the achievement of God's purposes for good in the whole of God's creation.⁷

Michal Gorman holds the Raymond Brown Chair in Biblical Studies at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland. His 2015 publication, *Becoming the Gospel, Paul, Participation and Mission*, states:

To put it simply: the cross of Christ reveals a missional, justified, and justice-making people. Because the cross reveals a missional God, the church saved and shaped by the cross will be a missional people. As the twentieth-century theologian Emil Brunner put it, "The Church exists by

mission just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission there is no Church.” (italics original)⁸

Darrel Guder of Luther Seminary has been a significant voice in the GOCN growth and development. He summarizes the Bible as Mission text with this statement:

The biblical formation of the church requires a hermeneutic that constantly asks, “How did the written testimony form and equip God’s people for their missional vocation, and how does it do so today?”⁹

Mission as the very being of God’s people, the Scriptures as a tool to shape the Church for its missional vocation, keeping in mind God’s entire focus of salvation after the Fall, mission formation in New Testament times—putting this all together requires an additional step.

So What Does This Have to Do with Preaching?

Preaching is the major activity for proclaiming the Kingdom of God, continually forming the mission response of the people of God. Preaching does not end with a “what God has done for me” affirmation. It equips and empowers God’s people to represent Him in the everyday world as the priesthood of the baptized. Not every Christian is a travelling missionary or a public preacher, but we are all Good News to the world around us.

If God’s mission is not talked about in sermons, it’s not going to happen. To remind me to keep looking for mission texts, I have pinned to the corkboard facing my computer a photocopy of Greek and English terms for missionary activity in twelve categories. Now, if only I could program my computer to flash “Mission” whenever these words and concepts occur in my sermon preparation and/or Bible study.

For example, under heading (1) Subjects of missionary work, Eckhard Schnabel lists these Greek words with English translations: fisher, apostle, worker/laborer, evangelist, herald/proclaimer, witness, fellow worker and helper/assistant. Other headings include (2) Addressees of missionary work, (7) Goal of the proclamation, and (12) Misunderstandings.¹⁰

Besides Schnabel’s mission word clues, Andreas Koestenberger has identified sixteen semantic clusters of mission as he works his way through the Fourth Gospel. He begins with cluster 1 in chapter 1, with the coming of Jesus into the world. He concludes with the calling of disciples to follow Jesus until He returns. In between is a rich feast for the missional explorer.¹¹

The one instance when congregations might encounter the mission of God on an annual basis is Ascension Day, when there is a reading of the Great Commission in

Matthew 28. But Ascension services are rare these days, and the reading of Matthew 28 is not always picked on the following Sunday. Post-Easter readings from John 20, where Jesus tells the disciples that as the Father has sent Him, He now sends His disciples on the same mission. But there are so many other mission texts that occur throughout the year for one who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

Permit me another personal story. In the late 1980s, Dave Hoover and I were commissioned to fill in a missing piece in the LCMS training process for planters of new congregations. There was nothing about stewardship in the extant materials. We were to fill the gap with a unit on stewardship preaching and teaching. We gave ourselves the assignment of individually working through the three-year lectionary to identify readings with stewardship implications. When we came together to write that section of the 47-page manual, we were surprised to find texts with stewardship almost every Sunday. I know we would have a similar result today if we worked through the lectionary on the lookout for mission.

Gorman offers Five Key Questions that preachers operating with a missional hermeneutic will want to ask of the biblical texts.

1. What do these texts say, implicitly or explicitly, about the polyvalent (complex and comprehensive) *missio Dei* and the mission character of God?
2. What do these texts reveal about humanity and the world?
3. What do these texts say about the nature and mission of God's people in the world, that is, about the church understood as an agent of divine mission (rather than an institution, club, civic organization, or guardian of Christendom)?
4. How do these texts relate to the larger scriptural witness, in both Testaments, to the *missio Dei* and the mission of God's people?
5. In what concrete ways, in our specific context, might we deliberately read this text as God's call to us as His people to participate in the *missio Dei* to which it bears witness?¹²

Bear with me for a long lost, but much remembered, citation on the subject of mission and vision in the world of business. When the leader of a corporation has become so sick of repeating the visionary message of where the company is going that one could not even think about repeating it one more time, then the message might have reached into the next level down from the executive offices. This insight keeps me going.

Keep at it. Repetition. Again and again. Eventually folks will catch on. But it is a long-term project, not a once and done event.

A long-term project,
not a once and done event

A word of encouragement to prepare for the long haul with missional preaching comes from John Dally:

Missional preaching is a long-term proposition—the gradual introduction of images, attitudes and language that work against more than a millennium of preaching that equated the Kingdom of God with the afterlife or the organized church. In time, however, missional sermons can shape missional communities, and the practice of these communities with in turn shape the preaching offered in their midst.¹³

I would be remiss not to reference some other works from my bookshelves that get regular reference for sermon preparation.

William J. Larkin Jr., and Joel F. Williams, ed., *Mission in the New Testament, An Evangelical Approach*. Orbis Press, Maryknoll, NY, 1999.

Particular chapters are devoted to Paul's writings, the Synoptics and Acts, the General Epistles and John's writings including the Gospel of John. This is a collection from the American Society of Missiology with catholic roots.

Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to John, Black's New Testament Commentary*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2006.

This is the first commentary this writer has worked through with a major focus on the mission aspects of the Gospel. A stunning insight is his finding of parallel use of the words for "sending" and "apostle." It ends with nine pages of notes that were shared with the pastors' Bible study group. Lincoln is Professor of New Testament at the University of Gloucestershire in England.

Andreas Koestenberger and Peter O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth, New Studies in Biblical Theology*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2001.

This is one of those tools to review each time one picks up a new New Testament book for homiletical preparation around mission themes. This writer now includes photocopies of the chapters on the Gospels with the individual three-ring binders.

Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission, Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives*, 3rd ed., Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2007.

In the manner of Koestenberger and O'Brien, it is a very readable look through individual New Testament writings with mission eyes. It was originally published in 1996 in Danish.

Copyright 2018 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 26, no. 2 (2018) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.html>.

E-mail lsfmissiology@gmail.com to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Clues abound in the pages of the New Testament for the mission of God. Each biblical writer appears to have unique insights into what that mission is and how it is to be carried on by the baptized people of God.¹⁴ Now the preacher's task is to lift up those insights for the mission formation of the Church. Need it be stated that preaching and the mission of God not be relegated to an annual emphasis or set aside because the mission point was made last year or the year before? It is truly a long-term proposition for every preacher in every congregation.

Endnotes

¹ Robert Newton, "Recovering the Heart of Mission," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 26, no. 1 (May 2018): 32.

² Richard Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Evangelizing Church, A Lutheran Contribution* (Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN, 2005), 36.

³ See my review of *A Scandalous Prophet, The Way of Mission After Newbigin* in *Missio Apostolica* 13, no. 2 (November 2005): 184ff.

⁴ Michael W. Goheen, ed., *Reading the Bible Missionally*, Chapter 3, George R. Hunsberger, "Mapping the Missional Conversation" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), p. 47. This is a collection of essays by a who's who of international scholars growing out of a 2013 conference at Calvin College. Goheen's chapter "A Missional Reading of Scripture and Preaching" is an excellent place to start.

⁵ Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally*, 8.

⁶ Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally*, 242.

⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission, Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 11.

⁸ Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel, Paul, Participation and Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 9.

⁹ Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally*, 25–26.

¹⁰ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission, Volume 1, Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 36–37.

¹¹ Andreas Koestenberger, *The Mission of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 32–37.

¹² Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 56.

¹³ John Addison Dally, *Choosing the Kingdom, Missional Preaching for the Household of God* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008), 124–125.

¹⁴ It has been my working assumption that readers of LMM are continually returning to two CPH publications: Georg Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, 2005, and Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission From the Cross*, 2009. However, I have recently put my hands on an out-of-print CPH treasure: Vicedom's, *Mission in the Lord's Prayer, A Prayer for the World*, 1967. Back in the days of parish ministry, I put together a number of series on the chief parts of the catechism. I harbor dreams of turning this little treasure into a Lenten series highlighting mission themes in the Lord's Prayer.

Missio Dei in Luke's Gospel¹

Richard Gahl

The *missio Dei* in Luke begins with the promise to Theophilus that one result of reading Luke's account will be that he will "know that what he has been told is true" (1:4)² and concludes with the charge of Jesus to the disciples that because of Him "people should be told to turn to God and change the way they think so that their sins would be forgiven. This should be told to people from all nations, beginning in the city of Jerusalem" (24:47, 48). Thus will the mission of God reach beyond Israel to all the nations of the world. In between the promise and the charge, subtle and not-so-subtle clues are drawn into the narrative for Theophilus to see.

Mary's Magnificat (1:55) holds up "the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants." It would seem that we should reference Genesis 12:3, "Through you every family on earth will be blessed," as the source of that promise. Zechariah describes his son, John, as the way preparer of the One who will "give light to those who live in the dark and in death's shadow" (1:79), a situation that would be true for everyone who does not see the "new day dawning from above" (1:78). This universal scope is repeated in the message of the angel to the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem: "I have good news for you, a message that will fill everyone with joy" (2:10).

Simeon continues this universality in the Nunc Dimittis, "He is a light that will reveal salvation to the nations and bring glory to your people Israel" (2:32).

Luke calls on Isaiah to describe what John, the son of Zechariah, was doing in the region around the Jordan River. "A voice cries out in the desert: . . . All people will see the salvation that God gives" (3:4, 6). He tells us that crowds, including tax collectors and soldiers, responded positively to John's call for a baptism of repentance. Since John is working on the boundaries of Judea, it is not too difficult to see the curious from across the Jordan among the crowds. Soldiers from the occupying forces were most certainly not Jewish.

In the temptation scene (4:1ff.), the second test involved the devil's taking Jesus to a high place. We see Jesus offered the power and glory of all the kingdoms of the world were Jesus to worship the evil one. Notice how the objective of the *missio Dei* is expanded well beyond Israel. The appearance at the Nazareth synagogue (4:16ff.) furthers the mission beyond Israel. Jesus read from the Isaiah scroll about the anointed one's telling Good News to the poor, announcing forgiveness to the prisoners of sin, restoring sight to the blind; all were connected to the year of Jubilee, announcing the year of the Lord's favor. But now the Jubilee was pushed further beyond the Promised Land. The widow of Zarephath and the leper Naaman from Syria are described as recipients of the New Year. Gentiles are blessed by the

Jubilee. And it has happened before. No wonder the assembly became enraged and attempted to throw Jesus over the cliff.

Perhaps there is even a hint of mission beyond Israel in the call of the first disciples following a fruitless all-night fishing expedition (5:1ff). After concluding a teaching session by the Sea of Galilee and borrowing Simon's boat for an offshore podium, Jesus indicates that the fishing crew should launch the boats one more time. They caught such a large number of fish that the nets began to tear (5:6). Were the fish all of the same variety? Likely not. Follow this catch with Jesus' commission: "From now on you will catch people instead of fish" (5:10). We might well see these words in anticipation of Luke 24:8.

Following a night of prayer in preparation for the selecting of twelve of the disciples to be apostles (6:12ff.), Luke reports that a large crowd of disciples and many other people met up with the new team. "They had come from all over Judea, Jerusalem, and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon" (6:17). Tyre and Sidon are in Gentile lands—a sign of things to come. We meet a Roman army officer in Luke 7:1ff. A valuable slave was near death, and he desired help. The soldier enlisted Jewish leaders to ask Jesus to come and save the servant's life. The leaders were quick to point out that the Roman officer "built our synagogue at his own expense" (7:5), in accordance with the custom of civic engagement that generous people often constructed buildings to house associations and even synagogues across the empire. After the ensuing dialogue with the Roman officer, Jesus turned to the crowd following Him to say: "I can guarantee that I haven't found faith as great as this in Israel" (7:9). The mission circle expands.

Johannes Nissen³ contends that "whoever does not lose his faith in me is indeed blessed" (7:23) is another reference to an inclusive mission. With Bosch and others, he paraphrases the verse to mean

Blessed is everyone who does not take offense (σκανδαλισθη) at the fact that the era of salvation differs from what he expected, that God's compassion on the poor and outcast has superseded divine vengeance. This is another way of saying that the new age is for all human beings. The mission of Jesus is inclusive.

The saving faith of the woman who had lived a sinful life in the city (7:36–50) is another example of the inclusive character of Jesus' unfolding mission. People on the fringe, the outcasts of society, are also included.

The demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes (8:26ff.) is another illustration of the expanding kingdom of God. The pig herding business is a definite signal that the setting for this miracle is not Jewish territory. Having restored the demon-possessed man to health, the man asked to join the entourage of disciples.

“But Jesus sent the man away and told him, ‘Go home to your family, and tell them how much God has done for you.’ So the man left. He went through the whole city and told people how much Jesus had done for him” (8:38, 39).

Three Samaritan stories help us to see the expanded focus of Jesus’ mission. In 9:51, Jesus’ disciples made an unsuccessful attempt to arrange lodgings for the group on the way to Jerusalem. Rather than calling down judgment, Jesus simply led them to another village. The Good Samaritan (10:25ff.) and the Samaritan leper who returned following the healing of ten are additional illustrations of the expanded mission.

Another easily overlooked mission text occurs in Luke 11 in the context of a charge against Him of working with Beelzebul (11:14ff.). Jesus states that Jonah, who was a miraculous sign to the people of Nineveh (11:29), and the queen from the south, who came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon’s wisdom (11:31), will both stand in judgment over those who do not listen. Jesus claims that He is greater than both Solomon and Jonah.

Four texts add to this listing. “People will come from all over the world and will eat in the Kingdom of God” (13:39). “All the tax collectors and sinners came to listen to Jesus” (15:1). The confession of the tax collector in the temple courtyard (18:23), “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” is held to be exemplary. And the meal in the house of Zacchaeus, director of tax collectors, prompts criticism that Jesus deflects with the statement: “Indeed the Son of Man is come to seek and to save people who are lost” (18:13).

Two statements place witness in front of occupying forces. In describing that the future will not be the proverbial bed of roses, Jesus gives encouragement to the disciples. “They will drag you in front of kings and governors because of my name. It will be your opportunity to testify to them” (21:12, 13), but they have the promise that His words and wisdom will be with them. That kind of witness was confirmed with the confession of the Roman officer in charge of the crucifixion. “When an army officer saw what had happened, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent’” (23:47).

In His last visit with the disciples following the Resurrection, Jesus clearly states the inclusive nature of the mission that He is passing on to them. “Scripture also says that by the authority of Jesus people would be told to turn to God and change the way they think and act so that their sins would be forgiven. This would be told to people from all nations, beginning in the city of Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (24:47, 48).

The mission of God is worldwide, for all peoples. It is to extend from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And that brings us to the next chapter in the saga of mission reported to Theophilus.

Endnotes

¹ Here follows a summary of missional themes the author identified in Luke for Transfiguration 2013.

² All quotations from Luke are taken from the God's Word to the Nations Bible Society translation (Grand Rapids: World Publishing, 1995).

³ Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, 4th ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 52.