

“Our Distinctive DNA – Part I”



There is an association that was started in 1970 in Minnesota and has spread to New Zealand, Australia, England and 10 other states in America. There are no dues, committees or community projects. They do hold a national convention.

The association is called the Lois Club - and there is only one requirement – you’ve guessed it - you have to be named Lois. The Dallas Morning News reported about 55 women who are part of the club who gathered (ironically) in the South Texas city of Donna. Their slogan is “I never met a Lois I didn’t like.” I guess they don’t need nametags at their meetings!

Attendance has been slipping, though, because Lois is not very popular these days. It dropped out of the top 100 names in 1954, and has not been in the top 1000 for new child names since 1983. That is the Lois Club.

Whether the Lois Club or the Lions Club, People gathering in groups based on some common bond is part of human experience. And though you might not think of it off hand – the church is a bit like the Lois Club – a gathering that is also held together by one name – not Lois – but the name of Jesus Christ. It is an association that started well before 1970 – back 2,000 years ago on the day of Pentecost and it continues until this very day.

All of the churches in Christendom gather under one name and work together to accomplish a common set of purposes. In systematic theology, the study of the church is called ecclesiology and one question it seeks to answer is: “Why did Jesus create the church?” One of the readers of my thesis, Dr. Robert Lighter, put it this way “Why did Christ build his church anyway? Its primary mission centers in three duties: The exaltation of the Savior and the Scriptures, the edification of the people of God and the evangelization of the lost” (5Dr. Robert Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical*

Theology, 235). Wayne Grudem, in a condensed version of his popular systematic theology said ... “Every church should attempt to fulfill the three purposes God created it for (worship, nurture, and evangelism and mercy).” Dr. Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs*, 117.

What Lightner labels as exaltation and Grudem as worship – we phrase worshipping. What lightner calls edification and Grudem nurture – we have divided more finely into growing and loving. And the final purpose is of course evangelism, or what we call sharing.

You see, as we gather with churches all across this world under the same name, Jesus Christ, we also share these common purposes. They are not just purposes for our church, but are purposes for the Church.

However, this morning, in our series of “Divine Directions” we are moving from these things that we hold in common to some of our particular distinctives. This morning we begin to look at our DNA, our unique calling for this assembly of believers. The best place to find a summary of this is in our mission statement:

Our mission is to glorify the Triune God through the richness of historic Christian worship as we grow together in faith and share God’s grace with others; anchoring all things in the truth of God’s Word.

You will notice that our mission statement has five parts (1) To glorify the Triune God, (2) through the richness of historic Christian worship, (3) as we grow together in faith, (4) and share God’s grace with others, (5) anchoring all things in the truth of God’s word.

Because our time is limited this morning’s message will focus on two of the five elements – 1) The glory of God, 2) historic worship. Next week we will finish the remaining three parts.

1) A God-Centered Church

We probably had about seven families who began to work on our mission statement last summer with the help of Trinity member Mike Slaughter who facilitated our sessions. He told us

“If you are talking to someone in the elevator and only have 30 second to tell them about your church – the mission statement will provide the best summary of who you are.” And so, if you are talking to that person in the elevator about our church I hope the first thing you will say is that Our mission is to glorify the triune God...”

My mentor, Dr. John Reeds asks his students, “What is the subject of the Bible?” And students chime in – Jesus, or the gospel, or redemption. And he answers, “no” – those lead to something else – What do they all lead to – The glory of God.

All things are to the glory of God.

- “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of god. 1 Cor 10:31. Every daily act should lead to God’s glory.
- “That every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil 2:11. Evangelism ultimately leads to God’s glory.
- “Let your light shine in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16. Good works lead to God’s glory.

This is a timely reminder for us as a new church, because there is a horrible pull, an unrelenting push, compelling us to be man-glorifying. Carl Anderson regularly reminds Trinity Fellowship regularly that it is about God and not about us and I hope to continue that message Why? Because we want to believe that we are here for ME and not for GOD.

John Piper said, “And surely I don't have to tell you in detail that this perspective of God-centeredness has been lost in our day, even in the churches. Man is the star in our contemporary drama and his comfort, his prosperity and his health are the great goals. Of course God is there on the stage, but only as a kind of co-star or supporting actor to round out the picture for religious and cultural expectations. - John Piper in his sermon, “God Created us for His Glory,” July 27, 1980. Accessed: <http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper80/072780m.htm>.”

May we shine the light on God and not on us. May God increase and us decrease. May we behold His beauty and not stare at ourselves in the mirror of life. Our mission is to glorify God in all things.

The Richness of Historic Christian Worship

When you are in that elevator sharing about our church, I hope the first thing you will tell the person who asks you about our church is that it is really trying to glorify God. The second thing I hope you mention is that our church values the richness of historic Christian worship.

You may have noticed already our value of historic worship. For example.

- 4-fold order of service is ancient. Call to worship – ministry of the word – response at the Lord’s Table and Dismissal.
- Weekly communion is the historically most common practice. Word / Table.
- Use of Creeds – and having a time for confessions of faith.
- Sensitivity to the church calendar to inform our worship experience.
- Being mindful of connection with our historic roots

For some of you, *this historic focus may seem quite odd*. Your church may have had monthly communion, or perhaps quarterly – The movement in many evangelical churches is to make communion less frequent, not more frequent! Maybe you have never been aware that a Church calendar exists – that annually marks days such as Advent, Easter, Lent and today, Pentecost Sunday? But, for others, *these forms of worship may be what you are used to*. In either case, why value a historic approach to Christian worship? Three reasons briefly:

First, it help us in our quest to glorify God. One way of taking our eyes off ourselves is to be reminded that God has been working over the past 200 centuries, and we are but a part of that great movement of the Spirit. I believe it can be arrogant for us to say – Hey let’s rediscover church for us in our generation. While methods do need to change – we must at the same time realize – as Malcolm McGregor so aptly puts it. “Jesus has not bee asleep at the wheel for the past 2,000 years.” Being historically grounded recognizes that God and the Spirit have been at work for 2,000 years.

Perhaps, just as God has developed the Canon in the course of church history. Just as God has grown His church – He has also left us with rich forms of worship to aid us. Having a historical perspective helps us to take our eyes off ourselves and to thus glorify God.

Second – historic worship follows a biblical practice. I am not saying that any church that does not have a particular historic form or approach is wrong. The Bible certainly does not say, for example, that you have to use a certain pattern of worship.

However, I will argue that churches who are not aware of their own history miss a precious treasure and that it was the practice of the NT church to be historically grounded. For example, the early church sang hymns that were based on or patterned after the Psalms. They were aware of their Jewish Heritage. The Old Testament was not abandoned as the New Testament was written! Also, the church, very early in its history, in the first and second generations of Christian, established creeds so that they would be reminded that the gospel was handed down to them. Dr. Rick Taylor reflects. “That NT writers referred to early creedal statements or hymns is, of course, well known. Examples of such are scattered throughout the NT.” - Dr. Rick Taylor, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Issue 591, 1991. The use of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8. There is a sense of history in the NT. Jesus tells the church in Sardis (who looked alive but was really dead) in Revelation 3:3 – Remember therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it and repent. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “So then brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught...” 2 Thes 2:15.

Now of course it is possible to overemphasize tradition - as has commonly been done in the history of the Church. Tradition, at times, has wrongly been set up as equal with Scripture, and in the NT - when that happens it is condemned by Christ. But in our day, the pendulum has swung far to the other side. We avoid anything that appear to be liturgical, or tradition, or historical.

Let me ask you, if the church has used Creeds from the pages of the NT until today, why do we view creeds as outdated and ritualistic? If the practice of communion was the central-focus of early Christian Worship, why would we so quickly abandon the Sacrament or deprioritize it? In our attempt to be creative in our worship these days – what is more creative than the use of ashes on Ash Wednesday, or the advent cycle leading up to Christmas? If the church has used a Calendar to inform its worship for 1,500 years, why have we so quickly abandoned it in the past 100 years? Just as the early church recognized their place in history and was grounded in the history of their faith, so we should also be aware of our own history.

This leads to the third reason we have adopted a historic approach – and that is as a corrective to great historical ignorance of the past 100 years in the evangelical church. Most Christians who join an evangelical church today have very little sense of connection to what God has been doing beyond the past 50 years. We like what is new, shiny and cutting edge. Yale professor Katharine Weber in her book, *The Music Lesson*, commented on American culture: “We like living in our new houses with our new furniture, on our new streets in our new neighborhoods...Personal family history can feel simply irrelevant.” For most Christians, Christian history feels irrelevant. Musician Rich Mullens rightly observed: “I think a lot of Protestants think that Pentecost happened and then the church disappeared until the reformation. One theologian Thomas Oden, who is trying to recapture a historical perspective said, “Modernity has blinded us from our historical perspective. It has cut us off from the past.” Oden argues that there is a modern chauvinism, which prefers the new and minimizes the old.

And so we are a part of a small but growing movement in the evangelical church that seeks to pay attention to our history. In Christianity Today last September, a group of scholars wrote an article called, “*A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future.*” It is a call for evangelicals to rediscover

historic community and connection. Here is one quote from that article: “We call evangelicals to turn away from forms of worship that focus on God as a mere object of the intellect or that assert the self as the source of worship. Such worship has resulted in lecture-oriented, music-driven, performance-centered, and program-controlled models that do not adequately proclaim God's cosmic redemption. Therefore, we call evangelicals to recover the historic substance of worship of Word and table and to attend to the Christian year, which marks time according to God's saving acts.”

As we were working on our mission statement, the value of historic worship was strong with that first small group. These are phrases from the brainstorming we did as a group. “Historic Christian worship, historic Christianity, richness of classical Christianity, historical Christianity, heritage of the church, tradition we have received.” As we were trying to phrase it just right, I think it was Dave Hentschel whose introduced that wonderful word richness. Though we are not part of a denomination – our desire is that at LCCC you will have a sense of historic connection – we do not exist outside of Christian history – and that adds **richness to our worship**.

Conclusion / Application

In conclusion – sometimes people say that our six-year old Hudson looks just like me. I see a lot of Tammy in all of our kids. I think Hayden looks a lot like my sister. Why? Because we carry similar DNA. We are related. As a church plant we are related to Trinity Fellowship Church. We carry her DNA with us – DNA that is God-glorifying, that seeks a historic Christian pattern of worship.

Your application this week is simple – 1) Find an elevator (OK – if not an elevator, then when you find yourself talking with a person about this new church!), 2) Turn to the person and tell them about LCCC – that we seek to glorify God and one way to doing that is by valuing historic Christian worship. Those are our distinctives – that is our DNA.