This paper provides an accessible biblical paradigm for changes that are taking place in mission strategies. Much evangelism that took place within a Christendom culture has been modelled on John 3, in its public form reaching its height in the 1950’s. To engage meaningfully with an unchurched culture the church needs to add a paradigm of evangelism modelled on John 4, equally biblical and less institutional.
BIBLICAL PARADIGMS FOR EVANGELISM

Inaugural Lecture for the commencement of the academic year of United Theological College, North Parramatta, February 22, 2016

By Rev Dr Ian Robinson, Alan Walker lecturer in Mission, Evangelism and Leadership

I wish to acknowledge the Barramatagal of the Dharug nation and the elders who held and hold their people and this land, and those who were removed and don’t their country.

In the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, Creator, Saviour and Discomforter
1. A Received Tradition of Evangelism

In this lecture I am going to bump you along a narrow track referencing both theology and practice of evangelism in order to help us to find our way forwards. We will look at the received tradition of evangelism (love it or hate it), observe why things are so very different now and explore a new paradigm that is more congruent with our time.

Let’s begin. Say the word ‘evangelist’ in polite company and a particular image or paradigm is projected onto the inside of their skulls. Usually it’s not good.

A century and a half after Finney turned spiritual revival into a popular methodology in Christian cultures, the public evangelist-preacher method came to its height in Australia when Alan Walker’s Mission to the Nation in 1952-3 prepared the churches and the public for the events of the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade.

They were like the Elvis Presley of the protestant churches, the first up to the microphone when mass media went global. We could do with more of them, but not the same as them.

According to a detailed historical analysis by Stuart Piggin (1989) it brought a revival, through large scale meetings that were media savvy, and reportedly, Piggin found, high on organization and low on emotion. Unlike Finney (who preached
Abolition of slavery) and Walker (who preached social justice and pacifism), Graham avoided all public political references, focusing on a ‘simple gospel message’ of personal conversion. By revival we mean widespread positive behavioural change and church attendance that was on the public record. When Graham returned in 1969 and 1979 there were diminishing returns.

Churches in large numbers followed his successful model of evangelism, not least because so many ministers had heard their call to ministry at these meetings. In large and small settings, the structure of this model still goes like this:

- Invite people to an event: come to church/dinner/Alpha, where we are the host.
- Hear a sermon/drama/song based on the bible.

The Gospel is that God commands all to repent from sin and be saved through the cross of Jesus Christ and not by doing good works (an emphasis from 15th century!). The action-in-response that a person expected to take is to come forward to make a public commitment of your life to God, then read the Bible pray and go to church, tell others to do the same and live moral lives. These guidelines were essentially a fence-building exercise. Each one valuable, but pharisaic in this form. This private conversion had no ongoing agenda for social transformation.

2. There’s a Different Menu Now

Now, this model does still work in church settings but only with great strain and with ever diminishing returns. Most ‘conservative’ churches are asking now what they can do.

The seeds were there then. No social transformation, no love of neighbor, even when people ‘came forward’, in my experience, they didn’t know what they were doing or what the preacher was talking about. Most had come ready to take a public stand, prepared by other means and other voices, usually a friend, and they would do that whatever the preacher said or did.

The growing anomaly has turned off some church leaders to the level of allergic reaction. I would add that some have fostered an intentional ignorance about evangelism, despite what the Basis of Union says about the necessity of witness: “The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant”, and despite what it says about the gift of the Evangelist: “The Uniting Church thanks God for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr. It prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds.” That’s where we have been. But now, most of us are wondering what we can do.

We can just feel it - things are different now. It is a cultural awareness statement.
Rachel Kohn (2003), Michael Reiter (2003), Kaldor (1994, 1995), Bellamy (2002) and many others have documented a deeply felt and widespread change of appetite towards another menu of spiritual searching, which I would summarise as (Robinson 2014,179):

- The love of Mystery, not programme
- Appreciation of the Other, not exclusive claims
- Care for the whole Earth, all faiths and all creatures.
- The authority of raw experience, including suffering or mysticism.
- The authority of peers, not history, not citizenship.

![Menu of Spiritual Searching](image)

In her bold memoir, Suzanne Clores (2000) drinks deeply of every kind of religious experience you can think of, and demonstrates in her memoir just how consumerist was the experimentation and how radical the autonomy with which this menu is tasted.

None of these five appetites on the menu are waiting for the church to arrive with the goods.

In the practice of evangelism, I would like to explore a little further how this loss of engagement can be described in several ways: starting points, prior understandings, disruptive moments and first message.
WE NEED NEW STARTING POINTS

As a starting point, the population is unchurched, un-bibled, visual communicators and too distracted to listen for 40 minutes. They have experienced more family breakdown, more information overload, more global awareness, more inter-generational tensions and more temptations to pleasure than probably any previous civilization.

THEY HAVE DIFFERENT PRIOR UNDERSTANDINGS

In their heads, there is no Creator now present (maybe only in the past), no sense of obligation to a greater good, no concept of moral law - public ethics have become thoroughly existential and pragmatic (so what?) not principled (why not?). They hold a growing suspicion of the claim to authority by anyone, any claims of miracle, celebrity testimonies and especially church clergy and their bible.

WE NEED TO FIND NEW DISRUPTIVE MOMENTS

Sharing the gospel is not proselytization. It is being normal. Three examples only.

To share our gospel is to show some self-respect. Aren’t you tired of self-secularizing, laundering God and Jesus out of your discourse when they are the wellspring of love and joy in your heart? Show some self-respect and others will give it to you to.

Secondly, in the course of normal life, people are always changing. Something they believed or disbelieved back then is not where they are now. Be part of the open horizons and the disillusionments; be helpful in the new needs and desperate searches that normal life throws up.

Thirdly, new ideas are always coming out and into competition in the public square, so it is legitimate to be out there and offer alternative ideas that may be transformative.

How do we do that? We need to be educative. Dr Jack Mezirow of Transformative Education Theory maintains that, in order to become open, people need a “disruptive moment”. The process works like this: “learning is understood as a process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1997). Such a revision brings about a structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It can lead to ‘a shift of consciousness that alters our way of being in the world’.

So what will open a person to such a deep shift in their prior assumptions? These days it seems only great wonder within Creation and deep personal pain, not a public event with a call to commitment. We can find more.
WHAT WE SAY FIRST MUST CHANGE

At the least, in order to get people’s tiny availability for giving attention and to hold it, we must change what we must say first, that is ‘evangelism’ - understood as a dialogical process not a proclaimed word.

Some attention-getters are the stuff of legend. I have never actually heard anyone say the famous opener: ‘Brother are you saved?’ but I have heard ‘if you were to die tonight, are you sure your eternity would be safe?’ It is still being used. We laugh if we are in the secular context because these starting comments are obviously anachronistic. They are not where people are starting from. Yet I found in University chaplaincy that other more open openers are just as anachronistic: ‘have you ever had a spiritual experience?’ “would you like to explore spirituality?’, ‘we are spiritual and not religious’ - as if! We can find better ways to begin.

Before moving to the concept of paradigm, I want to summarise that I spent time on a detailed list of changes because merely tinkering with our usual church agenda as the conservatives do, or on the other hand, abandoning our historic Christian roots as the progressives do, simply won't sustain transformative learning experiences. It is time for a new paradigm of authentic Christian engagement and I will to compare two chapters in John’s gospel to do so.

3. Paradigm?

But first – what is a paradigm?

The most obvious example is the internet. It is now such an everyday part of study, work, leisure, movies, even checking the local weather for the sake of the outside barbecue, that we don’t realise how new it is. In this case a technologically-driven new way of doing everything is an example of paradigm change. The printing press was one of these, and the contraceptive pill, and Henry Ford’s cheap personal motor car.

In the study of evangelism, if it existed in your world, we would once have spent time cataloguing the apostolic preaching of the gospel in the New Testament in order to come out with ‘the gospel’. That was tinkering. Now we must re-examine the context with the methods and the message. It is like what Thomas Kuhn (1970) laid out as the progress in the history of science, that it moves in steps of great change, paradigms. I have given some examples already. He was writing about scientific knowledge, but he acknowledged that he borrowed heavily from the Christian philosopher Michel Polanyi, who had in mind the greater field of knowledge (epistemology).

The gaining of knowledge, he found, followed a pattern – the norm was a gradual accumulation of data within the progress of a science; the norm accommodated a number of investigations of anomalies which eventually produced a new perspective or ‘model’ for that aspect of science which was contested by the
establishment but when finally adopted revolutionised the way that we thought of all other matters within that subject. It became the ‘new normal’. That’s paradigm change.

Kuhn’s and Polanyi’s observations have been applied to many fields of knowledge since, and we now acknowledge its contribution to the study of evangelism.

One personal example. Not more than a year into my first fraught ministry placement, planting a church in a large high-density high-needs public-housing estate, I was learning a lot! I needed to and I wanted to. One of the mums called me up to the flats, on the top storey of one of the many blocks of flats, because her new neighbour was going off the walls. I arrived like Nicodemus ‘by night’ and was introduced – ‘Ian is all right’ – and the new neighbour started blurting how she had let God down and her children and ... breathlessly for an hour we orbited god-guilt shame and manic anxiety for all that went so bad in her marriage, kids without a dad and a future alone so scary. Eventually, listening long and doing it hard to find any wonderfully sound counsellor-like spiritual thing to say, I said: "I don’t care whether you believe in God; I want you to know that God still believes in you!”. Her calm was almost instantaneous. Meanwhile, I wondered what my theological college mates would make of what I had just said and decided almost instantly that I would not care. In one sentence I had reversed the polarity of my received tradition of evangelism. It all rang a bell somehow but I wasn’t sure where I had heard this sort of thing. I am going to share it with you.
4. Clash of Cultures

But first a word of warning. Finding new paradigms of witness involves us in a clash of cultures. In church meetings, of course, but also within yourself. You will wonder who you are, what your peers will think of you, and worry about what valuables you may be leaving behind.

But this is not new. These same changes in theology and strategy were in tension at the very beginning of the church’s mission. Then too, the church and its leaders were riven with the culture clash between believers whose origin were Jew or Gentile, between the traditional methods and theology of conversion and what the Spirit of God was actually now doing among them and despite them. A helpful new paradigm in evangelism and mission may be simple but it is not going to be easy.

Currently, new tensions are emerging. The colours I paint are too lurid, but here is a picture of a clash that has been happening:

1. The failure to evangelise effectively brought some evangelicals to spend several decades shouting louder, preaching the Bible more fervently, demanding greater commitment, spending bigger in media, music and trophy testimonies. They are only starting to face the anomalies.

Meanwhile, evangelicals have been anxious to stay close to revealed scripture, in particular to the words and works of Jesus, but when they are also socially conservative they have fallen into pharisaic notions of purity. On the other hand
the Baptist Tim Costello made news by finding God on the streets of St Kilda (1998). There are new tensions emerging within that movement.

2. Liberals reacted to the cultural mismatch of relentless born-again-ism by inventing an equally strident evangelistic strategy of their own. I have often had it shoved down my throat with this mantra: “we don’t go for bums on seat around here, you know”. That strategy was successful – it emptied mainstream churches, and without bums on seats we don’t have hands to the plough either. We lost the person-power for ministries of justice and advocacy. They are starting to face the anomalies.

Meanwhile, liberals have remained **determined** to stay present to people in their context. Some have trumpeted too quickly the accusation of ‘colonialism’ or ‘proselytization’ (Dube, 2002, 65) when all that was meant was the evangel. There are new tensions within that movement also.

That overly lurid picture of a dichotomy is now fading like an old poster, thank God. We are all now asking - what can we do? What can God do with us?

Let’s gear up for this. For the past thirty years to my knowledge, major missiological statements from both ecumenical and evangelical networks have been almost synonymous. As we speak here, the World Council of Churches and others are in a major consultation in Hungary on “mission in secularized contexts”. Has this global theology reached the local leadership?

The Uniting Church gave its best leaders for over forty years to the shaping of an ‘ecumenical’ inclusive community. Now we must commit for a generation or two to forge a more deeply collaborative leadership in a rediscovered and re-imagined mission and evangelism. But will we snap into yet another methodology that is working somewhere else, like emerging church or Mission Shaped Ministry or 3DM or Common Dreams or Two-thirds world common sense approaches? There is everything right with all of them, let all the experiments flourish, but are we truly finding our own wellspring in Holy Scripture and Holy Spirit in our own time and our own place?

Let us now turn the page to do some re-discovery.
5. Contrasts John 3 and John 4

We will now turn the page from John 3 to John 4. Compare - how did Jesus evangelise the Jewish leader Nicodemus and how did he evangelise the Samaritan woman with no name? I will take the risk that you know these stories well.

I will use frame of ‘what’s different now’ that I just listed – what are their starting points, what were their prior understandings, what were their disruptive openings and what was said first?

What were the Starting Points?

In Physical Location:
Nicodemus comes to Jesus in his place. It is night. Jesus is the host. They are both men with standing, both well established in a shared Jewish identity and theology.

Jesus goes to Samaria – out of his way in the middle of the day. Jesus is the guest, probably unwelcome in Samaria or at least (as the woman and the disciples experienced (4. 9, 32), a surprise. He has relocated himself to meet racial, religious and gender boundaries. Respecting boundaries, by itself, is not an adequate description of what Jesus did.
In Social Location:
N is a ruler of the Sanhedrin, and as a Pharisee considered himself the ‘teacher of Israel’. Josephus describes them as popular and numerous. Vermes (2003) records that they formed the foundations of post-temple rabbinic Judaism. (3.1, 10). Here is a man with influence and a future.

Completely opposite, the woman has repeatedly been divorced. Some preachers hurry to judge her as immoral even though she had no rights in the divorces and Jesus observes that she has been consistently monogamous.

Again, preachers regularly infer her to be a social outcast because she is at the well at noon, even though at 4.28-30 she is well received by the village. We only speculate why she is there then - she might simply live next door! We only speculate why she is serially rejected by husbands – was she unable to bear children? Was she mentally disturbed? Was she so intelligent or so beautiful that they were afraid of her? Could she not cook? We simply don’t know why but her inner reality is as reject.

Prior Understandings

In their Knowledge:
N believes the Bible, 3.10. Jesus references the book of Numbers for him.

The Woman does not know much bible really, Samaritans ‘canonised’ only Torah. She is speculative about her religious question. 4.19, 20. Jesus avoids those questions.

In their Ethics:
The Pharisee likely believes absolutely in over-arching truth, the debt of obedience to God and the goal of virtue.

The woman is doing the best she can in life under the circumstances.

In their Authority:

Jesus quotes the scriptures as authority to N.

With the woman, Jesus famously sidesteps the religious question of centrality of worship (without giving it away his understanding of scripture either 4.22).

To my post-evangelical colleagues, if our message starts with the need to repent from sin, we are both wrong about sin and wrong about repentance. An awareness of sin only grows from an awareness of the love of God. Same with the place of scripture in our lives. To start there is un-wise and un-biblical.
To my post-liberal colleagues, we can name the injustices that have been done to her, lament them, start a petition, seek to act on her behalf, maybe act with her, but unless we impart the deeply resonant gospel of hope, she has no agency. When we go home at night, she has no-one. Justice without gospel is, to quote John Stott, a one-winged bird (and vice versa).

Let’s keep looking at John 3 and 4.

6. The Disruptive opening

Compare their Entry Points:

N is opened up by “the works”, Jesus’ openly miraculous power disrupts his theology – ‘this Galilean liberal clearly has God with him, dang it!’

The woman is arrested by the fact that the conversation opens up at all ‘you a Jewish man, me a Samaritan woman’ (4.9). But the beginning is not all - she is transformed by “he told me all that ever did”. We can cite Jesus’ knowledge of her as a miracle, a ‘word of knowledge’ as St Paul might say, and these still may come to us, but anyone with minor listening skill or empathic insight could soon get to know this story. But then, what is the quality of our responses?

Let me just say this - What people experience with us and in us is all they can believe of our message. What we say is who we are. (Drury2015; Weiser 2014)
Compare their crunch questions:

The rabbi Jesus confronts N with his religious and intellectual barriers to the Spirit, Ruach Ha Kodesh. Pharisees held that the age of prophecy was over and therefore God’s will is known only through the many precepts laid down in the revealed texts. (ICC) For Jesus the Holy Spirit is blowing around like the wind (3.8). Nic has therefore missed the most fundamental thing about knowing God and he should start all over (3.3) learning how to respond to and reflect upon the present Holy Spirit.

About such a fundamental change of life, even if it is prophesied in Jeremiah 17:12-13, about such a re-birth, Nic can only be incredulous. If crunch question is social and intellectual pride, the story never recounts quite how he deals with it. Nic appears again in John 7.50 and 19.30 acting at risk and in sympathy but it does state his inward change.

The twentieth century theological establishment thought a lot like Nicodemus. While we theologians debated anthropological myth, literary metaphor, historical method and scientific materialism, God unleashed the charismatic movement and changed the global church. It is an offense to many of us who are attracted or addicted to the European Enlightenment. How have we dealt with this confrontation?

By contrast, Jesus (acting as a fool) invited a disowned woman to an inward fullness of life in the Spirit. Her issue was that she just did not know – what a parallel situation in Acts 17 called ‘the days of ignorance’ that God is now offering to overlook. (It is a theme of John’s gospel. Richardson, 2010, 24).

My experience among the broke and broken people of a public housing estate tells me this is not some sort of happy ending or soft option in evangelism. Let us not descend into romance here - it is no less difficult for her than for Nic to change her long-standing and painful social location, to accept another spiritual source to her life and her sense of self.

What did Jesus say first?

Let’s compare their crux questions:

N hears an image of the Cross. The serpent lifted up (3.14-15, refers to Numbers 21.8) images how ‘the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life’. This is yet another place where Jesus in all of the gospels both predicts and provokes the cross as his destination. Note the appeal to the imagination in this image.

Similarly Jesus’ conversation appeals to her imagination, but with different content - the Woman hears first about a wellsprings of internal life (11) and only later comes to any notion of Jesus as Saviour or Messiah (26, 29, 42).
The first thing we say is shaped by where the listener is starting from, not where the evangelist wants them to be. Of course we agree, we all say, but do we say too readily what we already know in our heads we have to say? Has out listening gone far enough? Have we found where they are, not where we are? Are we responsive to the Spirit and to the uniqueness of this person?

Can we just note in passing that the same pattern is found in Acts 17? In the synagogues of Thessalonika and Berea (1, 10) the message focused around Jesus is based on the bible and the Cross. In Athens, the quotes are of Greek poets commenting on Creation and the resurrection of Jesus.

So, using this method of discovery, a ‘missiological critique’ if you will, we find there are two biblical paradigms in evangelism. This second paradigm is not a softer option; it is simply more biblical in contexts like ours.

May I anticipate two common objections to this position?

First objection, people often quote 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 to say that St Paul preached ‘nothing but him crucified’, and claiming that Paul somehow regretted his ‘different’ approach due the lukewarm response at the Areopagus in Athens.

In response, firstly, it should be noted, that "when I (Paul) came to you (Corinth)" (2 Corinthians 2:1), he first went into the synagogue. (Acts 18:1-5) – he rightly focused on the cross - as you might still today in a religious culture like for instance the Pacific Islands or in a Jewish or Muslim culture, unless those people were in practice secular.

Secondly, the results of the mission in Athens were the same as everywhere else in the New Testament – some said yes, some no and some maybe. It is no different in Athens.

Thirdly I have looked in vain to find where Paul makes even a hint of regret about the Athens experience. He had been deeply offended by the idolatrous culture there (Acts 17.16) but got over himself and communicated with knowledge and respect.

The second objection brings us to the matter of repentance:

Yes. Acts 17.30 and 26.20 say that God “commands everyone to repent”; a universal claim irrespective of context, but *metanoia* is not just about the darkness.

The religious man must be born again from above or both (ICC) of the Spirit from heaven, as he falls against the need for healing and salvation. The focus is on the uplifted Cross. He must turn (repent) from sin. *Life must not go on like this.*
The relatively non-religious woman is invited into the life that flourishes within, as she falls against a very different vision of who she can be. We might say now the focus is the Resurrection. She must turn (repent) towards new life. Life need not go on like this.

Both darkness and light are implicit in metanoia. Let us pause to summarise. What do I think I have done by making this contrast? In starting points, prior understandings, disruptive openings, and in the content and structure of the gospel message - those are enough elements in this reading to describe a paradigm of biblical evangelism as practiced by Jesus.

Secondly, this paradigm is more immediately congruent with our current experience of heightened tensions of race, gender, rejection and non-religiosity.

WE CAN TURN THE PAGE FROM JOHN 3 TO JOHN 4

- towards a more engaged paradigm for evangelism:
- Instead of being the host, we are the guest
- Instead of being in power we are vulnerable
- Discover/uncover rather than proclaim
7. Turn the page

To summarise two chapters of John’s gospel when we turn the page from the received traditions to a more engaged alternative paradigm, it looks like this:

- Instead of being the host, we are the guest
- Instead of bringing strength we become vulnerable
- We discover and uncover rather than proclaim
- The authority is the dialogue partner’s Life-experience not the bible
- The focus is new life in the Spirit not the cross
- Action-response is to begin to act in love in Jesus’ way - a path of discipleship in the community of Holy Spirit. A moment of life-long commitment is not expected. It has value but by itself simply feeds into consumerism.
Let me draw to the end by teasing out just a few implications for evangelism among post-Christian and nonreligious. (For the religious, stick with the John 3 paradigm). In practice there is some fluidity between these paradigms, of course.

**SOME IMPLICATIONS**

- **Remove power differentials & relocate**
- **Provoke with kindness, beauty, wisdom and imagination**
- **Apologize, re-educate, discover, self-respect**

1. **Remove power differentials.** We have to establish horizontal status relationship, not friendships necessarily, in order to re-create our credibility. It seldom helps the mission grow if we feel we must be a provider of resources to the wider community, i.e. playing the strong one. This is where post-colonial perspectives are critical (Hull 2014). To be incarnational is to be human but no more than human. The programmes we do really well may be just as much an impediment to the gospel as the things we have done badly. To do this requires that at least a large proportion of us relocate ourselves physically and socially.

2. **Be Provocative** with our depth, beauty, kindness, wisdom and imagination, invent new parables from every day and forsake our commentary on society’s moral rules. The evangel is a spiritual discipline of transformation, not an event, not an agenda item on church-as-usual. (Robinson 2014,199). We too, even in the act of sharing the evangel, are being changed in a specific kind of journey. (Nouwen 1976)

3. **Do not defend the church,** **apologize.** (www.wxedi.net). We must instead **Re-source** people in their thinking about Jesus. There is serious disinformation and blasphemy about. Be gentler and share our **discoveries** as a human being (1 Peter 3.15,16). When we do that we can stop the exhausting ourselves from the constant
translation effort of censoring and secularizing ourselves. This requires little more than respect for ourselves as Christians which most persons are willing to give to us, alongside respect for them and their choices. You can never say often enough – ‘I am not just dropping this on you, it is up to you. I just think it is really good’.

4. **Ask questions**: be curious to understand the uniqueness of each person all over again, and test our perceptions before we attempt answers. For instance: where do you get your strength from; how do you know that is true; do you ever feel you want to give thanks for all the good things; do you sometimes sense the enthralling awe in life; do you think Jesus went through all that just so we could be religious; etc. These are only openers.

5. **In Training ordained leaders**, we commission them to be the ones to monitor the machinery inside the church. Give them a break; they cannot simultaneously be outside the church to model evangelism.

From many surveys on how persons came to faith in Christ, it is clear that lay persons do ninety percent of the work. However, if ordained pastoral work does not actually equip and encourage church lay members to find their own voice with their own faith for their own worlds, they have mightily failed them and may have consigned the church to reach at best ten percent of her potential. Coaching skills that empower authentic witnesses is a much better focus for teaching pastoral care than counselling skills, courage for the contest and not just comfort to the weary.
6. If my theology about paradigms holds even some water, it is both possible and necessary to study evangelism afresh, in all its modes with individuals, groups, congregations, regions and cultures and in all the categories of skills, strategies, spiritualities and theology. We can do that without detracting from the mission Dei, the wind of the Spirit. Such a study teaches us how to follow, how to listen, how to rig a sail and hold it to the wind of the Spirit.

Let’s close with a summer night story.

9. A Story from Under The Lanterns

I believe that a Christian who shows he or she is curious about and actually cares about each person uniquely, who is humble about being wrong, who is generous, humorous and hospitable, will gradually undo the reputation that Christianity has no truth in it, offers no personal resource, is primarily interested in its own privileges.

I believe that a society that has cut its own roots in Christianity, that is digging deeper therefore into its other rootstock of Roman imperialism, that overlooks that travesty of corruption and suffering, thatpunishes the weak, that makes money the only measure of value, that, as CS Lewis said now ‘believes in anything’ can be arrested by risky acts of worship witness and service in the ‘prophetic’ tradition (Hull 2014). As the blight of darkness deepens, their radiance is being seen.
I believe that a church which is still waiting for people to come, as the result of great publicity or signage on the highway or their website or their rock band, is still in the 1950’s. A church, who re-trains in wondering, witnessing, inviting or engaging with life-questions, has half a chance of saying something worth hearing.

I believe that church leaders who disciple others by personal mentoring and not just by programme, who give up some of our great old stuff in order to make room for whatever God gives, who lead in prayer - these are those who empower the church to be fruitful.

So this is why I finish with this story from just last week. After eleven years of Catholic school education, under the lanterns of a summer night, this bright bold professional woman was being as polite as she could be after learning that I came here to teach theology.

“What sort of engagement with the community will you be having?” she asked.

I gave the safe demographic reply but then ventured to add what my heart had to say: “What I really believe is that when the church tries to be the church, its institutional values become suffocating. When the church tries to be Jesus together, their impact for the common good is simply spectacular.”

I braced myself for the usual objection - “paedophile priests”, “discredited bible”, a world of pointless suffering, etc – but instead she said: “That’s a very beautiful way to put it. Thank you.”

And I thank you for the privilege of giving me your time and attention. God bless us as we go. I invite you to join me in this prayer –

Lord Jesus Christ, at this year’s commencement we now hop aboard this coracle once again. We hope we can all learn to paddle in the same direction, but even more we hope that your Spirit blows us where He wills, and we shall arrive at the place and the moment of your choosing, more ready and more responsive. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

What is the paradigm that has influenced you most, positively or negatively?

What will happen to you if you adopt John 4 as your paradigm?

Of the six Implications listed, which ones do you feel most needy for?

DEFINITION:

Evangelism is a defining aspect of Christian discipleship where the good news of Jesus is explained and offered into the life-context of another.
SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY


Nouwen, Henri (1976) Reaching Out – the three movements of the spiritual life, Collins Fount Paperbacks, Glasgow


Robinson, I (2014) Burning Hope, Mediacom, Adelaide

Stockton, Eugene (1998) Wonder – a way to God, St Paul’s Publications, Australia


Weiseth, N. (2014) Speak – how your story can change the world, Zondervan, Michigan