

Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World

A Summary

The Problem

With this, we are well acquainted. Alan Roxborough describes a "great unraveling" of the institutional church. By almost any metric, the church is shrinking, yet there is hope in the opportunity of change. In his second and third chapters, the author describes a host of reactions that have proved inadequate. These include the illusion that it can be fixed or managed or the inadequate reliance on a few specially-trained clergy people. Roxborough argues that the current "unraveling" presents an existential problem that leads us to existential answers.

The Opportunity

...is a holy imagination. Let's be honest, there's no true solution, yet Alan shares with us a method that takes seriously a "Missionary" God. Rather than place human works at the center of church, Roxborough rightly suggests that we take seriously what the church is: the body of Christ, God's presence in the world. Like Jesus, we meet people where they are. A few truths:

- God "sends and participates in the world," and "the church is a living embodiment" of God.
- The church is sent to engage in our "postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized contexts"
- "Every believer" is a "disciple engaging in mission."
- "God is already ahead of us" in mission. Our task is to discern where and how and live it out.
- Our "primary work is to listen for what God is already up to" (pp. 43-44).

The Practices

Listening: Attending to God, one another, and our neighborhoods

- I. Dwelling in the Word
 - A. Read Luke 10:1-12 twice
 1. After first reading: ask people where they stop, what grasps them, what questions they have as it is read a second time
 2. After second reading: provide space for discussion
 - B. At the end of the time, ask how you're being called to practice Luke 10 in your neighborhoods
- II. Listening to our neighborhoods
 - A. Map your neighborhood, marking important landmarks and gathering places
 - B. Eventually, walk around your neighborhood, noting who is there and what it looks like at different times.
 - C. Note who is present, who is invisible
 - D. Listen for needs in the neighborhood
 - E. Reflect on what you're learning in your neighborhood

Discerning: Discovering where the Spirit is inviting us to join with God in our neighborhoods

- I. Discernment is more than simply analyzing and deciding
 - A. It's asking how the Spirit is moving in us and the world
 - B. Wondering what concrete steps can be taken

- II. Discernment Gatherings: 3 Meetings
 - A. Prior to first meeting, ask people to write down observations from their neighborhoods and where they believe the Spirit is leading them
 - B. In the first meeting, take time to dwell in the Word and share observations
 - C. Pray between meetings
 - D. In the second meeting, share where they saw God at work in their neighborhood that week.
 - E. Between the second and third meetings, ask yourselves the following questions:
 - 1. Where do you sense the Spirit is inviting you to join with God in your neighborhood?
 - 2. What are some of the ways you can do that?
 - 3. What might this look like over the next two months.
 - F. Third meeting: dwell in the Word, share observations from the past week
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Testing: Engaging simple actions to join with God in the neighborhood

- I. Try, Try again!
 - A. This is the point in the process in which you try new things, be willing to fail, and act on the discernment and listening that you have been doing.
 - II. Experiments that work are
 - A. Simple, not complicated; Don't require much structure; Open-ended and flexible
 - B. Free of professional or expert support; Challenging
 - C. More focused on listening; open to partnership and Spirit-led work
 - III. Examples:
 - A. Trying a book club
 - B. Community garden
 - C. Hanging out at a coffee shop
 - D. Plan community events
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Reflecting: Gathering to ask what we did, what we're learning and where we see God at work

- I. Share stories of what you did
 - II. Share how your attitude changed and how you experienced God, what worked and what didn't
 - III. Share what you're learning about this journey and your neighborhood
 - IV. What new questions do you have?
 - V. What are the key things to share with the congregation?
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Deciding: Determining the new ways to join with God in the neighborhood

- I. This is the leader's time to step up, curating the process of deciding
- II. Formulate a plan by which the congregation enters the process and a small group leads the listening, discerning, testing, and reflecting
- III. Communicate key learnings, takeaways, and the results of the reflection process
- IV. Gather leaders and share findings in the process
- V. Gather the congregation, communicate the process and the results so far
 - A. What have you learned
 - B. How have you changed
- VI. Do another round of listening, discerning, testing, and reflecting