



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

Pastor's Update

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By Pastor Merv Thompson

"Grace and peace to you from the God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The most effective congregations are usually those which have a plethora of innovation and creativity. The term "innovation" actually refers to a new idea, a new way of doing things, a new concept, a new direction. And it would seem as if the Bible highly values innovation as Jesus says, "Behold I make all things new." Also, it is the Apostle Paul who writes, "If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come." There are so many instances in the Bible of innovation, something brand new, a new covenant, a new testament, a new church, a new life.

There is such a tendency in the church and other institutions to resist anything new, to cling to the old, "give me that old time religion, it's good enough for me." But it seems as if the Bible is consistently calling us to something new, a new exodus, a new heaven, a new earth, and a new day. The church needs to take more seriously the old adage, which I have used before in these pages, "If your horse is dead, dismount."

When Jesus joined the disciples in the boat, and they had not caught any fish through the night, he did not tell them to do the same thing over again. Someone has said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. But Jesus said to the disciples, "Move your nets, try something different, put your nets down on the other side of the boat." When they followed his command, they caught more fish than they could handle.

Tom Friedman is a well-known author today. His latest book is titled [The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century](#). I heard him interviewed the other day, and he was talking about the incredible amount of innovation which is taking place all across America. He is trying to document some of the most fascinating innovations because he believes that this century to come will be greatly

influenced by the innovators among us. Because of all this innovation there is a very optimistic feeling about the future of the world, because so many people are reinventing their own fields, their own disciplines.

But in the course of the interview, he made a statement which resonated with me. He said that very often innovation happens when you put together two or more very different disciplines, different ideas, disparate competencies. When you take something from one discipline and you combine it with another in a way that is not usually done, you can have something very creative and innovative.

For instance, in my ongoing pursuit of writing a book on the music of the 1950's, I have spent some time looking at one of the most prolific innovators of our time. His name is Les Paul (of Les Paul and Mary Ford fame). Les Paul was an excellent musician but also was very gifted in the area of electronics and sound. It was Paul who truly perfected the electric guitar and also was a pioneer in the whole area of recording. Together with Bing Crosby, he created one of the first state-of-the-art recording studios that eventually would help revolutionize the way sound is recorded and transmitted.

When you put together disparate disciplines and skills, you often find incredible innovation. I think about our pastoral staff here at Lutheran Church of Hope. For instance, Pastor Caroline puts together a background in medicine with pastoral ministry and thus brings very unique perspectives. Pastor Richard combines a deep intellectual and theological background with tremendous musical talents, thus helping to shape our worship and music. Chris Gunnare brings incredible business and organizational skills and incorporates them into the life of a congregation in very innovative ways.

Of course the best example of this joining of disparate disciplines comes from the Bible. Why should we be surprised? On the one hand we have a very strong emphasis in the Scriptures on the Great Commission *Go and make disciples of all nations*. On the other we have this consistent teaching of the Great Commandment, *You shall love God and love your neighbor as yourself*. The problem is that most congregations over the centuries have not been able to bring these two very different ideas together.

For the most part, mainline churches have focused primarily on the Great Commandment, love for God and for neighbor. These churches have had a strong emphasis on social ministry and caring for the poor and helping those in need. Yet there has often been little evangelical outreach. Most of these denominations are declining precipitously.

On the other hand, evangelical churches have centered their emphasis on the Great Commission, reaching out to the unchurched, searching for the lost, making new disciples. At the same time most of these congregations have had little emphasis on the great commandment, caring for the least of our sisters and brothers.

In my opinion, the reason that Lutheran Church of Hope is exploding in both numbers and energy is because it has combined these very different emphases, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. In the current movement called the Emerging Church, one of the most important claims is that of a third way. It offers a third way instead of the way of mainline or evangelical. Central to this third way is that of embracing both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Because Hope has embraced both of these, I think innovation has exploded. Think of the emphasis on the Great Commission. A huge Easter event at Wells Fargo for 12,000 or more people, designed especially for the seeker, the unbeliever. Or think of Alpha, this incredible program at Hope which has introduced large numbers of people to Jesus Christ and where the Holy Spirit has transformed their lives forever. Or think about the shaping of the new worship center where thousands more will be

captured by the Gospel and become disciples. The vision of Hope is very clearly and unequivocally that of evangelism and outreach.

At the same time Hope has focused dramatically on the Great Commandment. During the 40 days of Lent, we have provided more than 1,588,800 meals for Haiti, 12,000 lunches were served to the local homeless community and more than 3000 bags of groceries (54,00 meals) were distributed to non profit and food shelters. We send people on mission trips throughout the world. I am convinced that most people truly want to help others, to share their gifts and resources with those less fortunate. So often they just have not known how to do this. Hope has given people multiple entry points to serving others.

Again, it seems to be this intersection of diverse ideas, disciplines and teachings that seems to spark so much innovation. The synthesis that comes out of this intersection then leads directly to innovation. All of this seems to reflect the will of God who talks about making all things new.

As we continue to find ways to put together ministry and mission together with a widely diverse and talented group of members and visitors, we will find innovation accelerating. Most of the good ideas for the future effectiveness of Hope have not been thought of yet, but the Holy Spirit will inspire them in good time. I can hardly wait.