

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

SEPTEMBER 2009

COVENANT RENEWAL AND REDEEMER'S "DNA"

BY TIM KELLER

This month marks the 20th anniversary of Redeemer's first morning worship service, which was held the last Sunday in September, 1989 at 111 East 87th Street, in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. As we reflect back on the 20 years this anniversary represents, we will also look ahead this fall to our next decade of ministry in NYC by launching into a season of renewing our vision and calling. On our anniversary Sunday, September 27, we will kick off the RENEW campaign—"a hope, a vision, a city." At other anniversaries I've written about how important 'Covenant Renewal' seasons were in the life of Israel. Before some great new venture was undertaken—before

entering the Promised Land or building a new temple, or anointing a new leader—the people took a long, prayerful look at their past. First, they reminded themselves what God had done in their midst, and also what he had called them to do in the world. Secondly, they recommitted themselves to that calling in the present. They made promises and brought gifts. Finally, and only after they had taken these first two steps, they turned toward the future and the new venture.

Let's begin this process! This month in the newsletter I want to look back at our calling and our past. In the next two newsletters we will look at the next stage in our journey together and

as a church in New York City.

Redeemer's 'DNA'

I came to New York City having learned from reading and experience that the gospel of grace was powerful, and was distinct from merely being good and moral. I first learned this by reading the chapter in C.S. Lewis' book *Mere Christianity* titled "Nice People or New Men?" In seminary I learned from church historians that, when the core of the gospel was rediscovered, it led to spiritual revival in the church. In my ministry in Virginia and Philadelphia I had begun to see real life examples of this renewal. Nevertheless, in the early days of Redeemer I
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CHANGE YOUR LIFE IN SEVEN WEEKS

On a Sunday evening during the summer of 1993, a young man walked through the doors of Hunter College Auditorium. It was his first time there. He was forced to return to New York from New Orleans after two years of desperately pursuing a career in the music industry. After being thrown out of the band that he founded, he made the trek back to New York with his head hung low and his

spirit broken. What complicated matters even more was the fact that New Orleans put a hurting on him in a way only New Orleans could.

Right before he left New Orleans, however, he began to search his soul. He began the process of finding answers to the bigger questions in life. "Is there a God?" "If so, what is his plan for my life?" Yes, he had an innate philosophical bent, but the exer-

BY MATTHEW PAUL BUCCHERI
cise he was about to enter into would prove to be life changing.

Redeemer had just moved into Hunter College, and since the church's attendance was barely 1500 divided between two services in a space that held an aggregate 4400, finding a seat was easy, even when showing up a little late. This provided a great excuse for arriving after the service had started and tiptoeing
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was still quite fuzzy on just how extensively the gospel ‘changed everything.’ Along with other Redeemer leaders we came to realize that the gospel changes the individual heart and life, it creates a new kind of community among us, and it also empowers us to renew and reach the city, culture, and world. Three headings: the gospel and the heart, the community, and the world. This vision turned out to be far more comprehensive than anything I’d imagined when I first arrived. We now call this vision our gospel ‘DNA’—a set of ministry priorities and practices that flow from our reflection on the implications of the gospel for our life together.

The Gospel and the Heart

What do we mean by ‘the Gospel and the Heart’? We mean that the gospel motivates us to a life of Christlikeness through the beauty of grace attracting the heart toward God, rather than through guilt, fear, and pressure on the will. Traditional religion extracts moral compliance through fear of condemnation; the gospel creates an inward explosion of grateful joy toward the one who died so there is now no more condemnation for us. The ordinary way the human heart operates is to assume that God loves and accepts them because of the level of their devotion to Christ and their sub-

mission to the Bible. As a result, many churches are filled with self-righteous, irritable, overly critical, deeply insecure people who can never be sure they are devoted or submitted enough to please God. The gospel is not that we give God a good record and then he owes us, but that God—through the costly sacrifice of Jesus Christ—gives us a perfect record, which we receive by faith, and then we live gladly for him. The gospel, in other words, changes the ordinary way the human heart operates, transforming it at the foundation.

The Gospel and Community

What do we mean by ‘the Gospel and Community’? When a church is changed by the gospel, it produces an unusually balanced set of ministries. It emphasizes connecting people to God through evangelism and worship that draws people to faith. It also connects people to each other in a new way. The gospel both humbles us out of our pride and self-righteousness and yet loves and assures us out of our insecurity and shame. This frees us for relationships that are far less possessive, deceitful, political, and exploitative than we have known before. Thirdly, the gospel virtually drives us outward to connect to the city, toward the needs of the city, and particularly toward the poor. When we realize our

dependence on sheer grace, it removes that kind of tribal mindset. We set out to make the city a good place for all people to live, and to love our neighbor sacrificially whether or not he or she believes as we do. Finally, the gospel connects Christians to the culture. A moralistic mindset sees ‘the world’ as a profane place that we should have as little to do with as possible. The secular mindset makes work into almost a form of self-salvation, a way to prove yourself and amass wealth or achievement. The gospel leads us to integrate our faith with our work, to turn our vocation into a way to serve others rather than ourselves, and to reshape our job with the priorities of God’s kingdom.

I have often had visitors ask me about the unusual balance—evangelism, small groups, justice and mercy, and faith-work integration. One or two of these features are visible in other churches but seldom do they all make an appearance. I respond that the balance is the result of sustained reflection on the implications of the gospel for community life.

The Gospel and the World

What do we mean by ‘the Gospel and the World’? Three things.

First, it means seeing the city and world the way God sees it.

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REDEEMER REPORT

Cregan Cooke
Heather Klein

HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM
East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington)
services at 10:30AM • 6:00PM

ETHICAL CULTURE
West 64TH and CPW
service at 9:15AM

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Corner of West 79TH and Broadway
service at 5:00PM & 7:15PM

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REDEEMER'S ARTISTS SUPPORT THE VISION CAMPAIGN

On Friday, October 16 from 6:00PM to 9:00PM at the Redeemer Offices the Arts Ministry's annual Juried Art Exhibition will open with a reception, music, and other fun activities. Proceeds from art sales will benefit the Vision Campaign—just like they did for the very first exhibition we held five years ago! If you have walls that would look better with some great art, and would like to support Redeemer's vision and Redeemer's artists, make plans to come that night! On top of all that—all art purchases that night will be discounted 10%.

The theme of this year's exhibition is "I Harvest"—"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:37-38). Works will be displayed and for sale until January 2010.

A "juried" exhibition is one in which a group of curators (in our case, Redeemer artists) select works that best fit the exhibition's theme and context. Generally,

in this annual exhibition, 40-50 works are selected from approximately 100 submissions from artists in the extended Redeemer community. Genres include painting, photography, mixed media and other two-dimensional forms. Submission guidelines (deadline: September 18) and more information about the exhibition are available at faithandwork.org/exhibition.

Also for the Vision Campaign, the Arts Ministry will be hosting a School of Gospel Foundations class, "Culture Makers," on Sundays after the East Side morning service from October 25 to November 22. Redeemer's vision for cultural renewal depends upon the engagement of our congregation with the world. Using Andy Crouch's acclaimed book, *Culture Making*, as a guide, we will look more closely at how Christians can serve God through "making" culture and transforming our world through our vocations. The class will feature talks from "culture makers" in our community from the arts and

entertainment, education, community development, civil service, and more. More information available at:

www.faithandwork.org/culturemakers.

The Artists Fellowship Groups will be participating in the Beta Group Bible Studies that will be following the Vision Campaign sermon series from September 28 to November 15. Even if you're unable to make an ongoing commitment to be part of a group, if you're an artist, please feel free to join a group for this study period (you might decide you like us and decide to stay!). We have three Artists Fellowship Groups (open to artists in all disciplines), including a group that meets during the day for those who work at night. The Musicians Ministry also hosts several Musicians Fellowship Groups. More information is available at:

www.faithandwork.org/afg.

Questions? Contact the Arts Ministry at arts@redeemer.com or (212) 808-4460 x1344.

HOPE FOR NEW YORK VOLUNTEER FAIR: SERVING OUR YOUTH

On Sunday, September 20 don't miss the HFNY Volunteer Fair: "Serving Our Youth" edition. This is a great opportunity to connect with HFNY organizations that serve the children and youth of our city. Come check out their work, find volunteer opportunities you can get involved in and be a part of renewing our city by impacting the new generation! The fairs will follow the East 10:30AM and West 5:00PM and 7:15PM Redeemer worship services. To learn more about volunteering or making a donation, please visit www.hfny.org.

It means not creating a we/they environment where we put down people who don't believe the way we do, but instead love and serve them. Redeemer has not sought to be part of a "tribe" or become a "tribe," but to fight against boundaries that keep Christians "in" and non-Christians "out." We see God at work in and through the church but also outside the church.

Second, it means that the gospel enables us to adapt and 'incarnate' our message in a way that makes sense to the culture of our neighbors. Religiosity always produces a series of very detailed rules and regulations for Christian practice. That stems from the basic insecurity of religious people. They are not sure if they are being 'good enough', so they add many human-made rules to assure themselves that they are living up to standards. But this creates cultural narrowness. In short, the gospel makes Redeemer culturally flexible and has enabled us to create a ministry that connects and convicts center-city New Yorkers. Put another way, Redeemer has 'contextualized' the gospel for center-city people without compromising it. Our emphasis on the arts, intelligent public discourse, working toward cultural transformation, our concern and connection to the city, the pursuit of excellence but avoidance of slickness—all these are the natural outcomes of urban people coming to faith in Christ and developing a Christianity that is both natural to New York City culture yet challenging to it as well.

Third, it means recognizing the role of churches in this gospel renewal of the world, and planting more of them.

Summary

Let's review what we've said so far. I believe that God has given us a "calling" to be a church that demonstrates to the city that "the gospel changes everything." This includes: 1) using the gospel of grace, rather than fear and guilt, to motivate and change people, 2) being a church with an integrative balance of evangelism and worship, community, justice, and faith-work integration, 3) being kingdom-minded and city-minded in our friendships, work, and church life rather than turf-conscious and tribal, and 4) becoming culturally flexible and engaged so as to communicate the gospel in a way that connects to the heart of our neighbors.

But we are not finished. The final aspect of our mission is this: that we replicate ourselves—that we reproduce other churches with a shared vision of gospel transformation. We have always been committed to being a church planting church. To do this in Manhattan (as opposed to other global cities through the Church Planting Center) requires being willing to sacrifice our own growth and comfort to start other churches. When we expanded worship services from the upper east side to the upper west side, we were moving away from being one big megachurch. Now we want to further decentralize these two congregations and form a third, south of Central Park, which com-

bined will become the church planting engines for future church plants.

What then lies ahead? We can think of our next 10 years as the decade of the 'Gospel and the World'. This encompasses more focus on the gospel in our vocations and culture and serving the poor and the needy in our city. But underlying our ability to move out into the world with the gospel is our vision for becoming three congregations, still connected by vision and preaching, but repurposed to focus outward—on starting new churches and reaching the unchurched.

The reason I'm excited about this next decade is that it's about all of us doing this together. For the last 10 years, our congregation has generously supported the Church Planting Center to start churches in NYC and other global cities around the world. But this vision returns our focus on Manhattan and engages all of us in this church planting work.

On this 20th anniversary, it is time for us to gratefully remember all that God has given us and remember our calling as a church. We'll spend most of the fall working through this together. As in all covenant renewals, there will be an opportunity to discern new ministry goals, to renew our commitment to each other, and to make pledges of our gifts and resources to accomplish our objectives. That is why, in this fall of 2009, we are conducting our next Vision Campaign. Next month in the newsletter, and other venues, I'll begin to lay out the framework for this next stage

THE NEW BIRTH PORTRAIT SERIES

This year marks Redeemer's 20th Anniversary. One way that we plan to celebrate 20 years of changed lives is through the New Birth Portrait Series. The New Birth Portrait Series is a collection of video portraits that seek to explore and further articulate the 'New Birth' through the lives of New Yorkers. This is a great opportunity to introduce a friend to the Redeemer community.

Sunday, September 27 from 11:00AM to 7:00PM
Happy Monkey Studio, 348 West 36th Street, Ground Floor
(Take the A,C, E to 34th Street)

CHANGE YOUR LIFE IN SEVEN WEEKS

(CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

into a back row seat unnoticed. Several years passed as he worshiped and thought through his questions at Redeemer incognito. But all that would soon change.

One evening after the service, someone asked this young man to come visit a Fellowship Group that met on Friday evenings in Midtown. Unfortunately for him, her request came on the same night that Tim Keller made this statement from the pulpit: "If you're not in a Fellowship Group, you're not in the church." He found himself bothered by hearing this statement, but was even more bothered by her request. Thinking that he could show up once and shut her up, he journeyed to the Midtown group that next Friday.

When he showed up that first Friday night, he was greeted by a group of people that immediately provided him with the atmosphere to process his questions. They weren't demanding or threatening, and quite frankly, they were asking the same questions themselves (and it didn't hurt that the snacks they provided were also good). This made it easy for him to fit in and feel comfort-

able searching out answers. But over time there was one question he was not asking that he soon began getting answers to: what is Redeemer's vision for New York City and how do I fit into it? And it was this question that would soon cap off his quest for answers. He began to understand not only (1) who God was and what he did in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and (2) what God's plan was for this young man's life; but also, (3) how that plan would play out at Redeemer given the church's unique vision for the city.

How do I know this to be true? I was that young man.

Beginning September 27, 2009 more than one thousand people who are not already in Fellowship Groups will be given the opportunity to process these questions during the RENEW campaign as part of a Beta Group.

The RENEW campaign is about remembering our hope for the city and renewing our pledge to love and serve it. Redeemer has been about that for twenty years and now, through this campaign, we hope to fund the first step in our 10-year-plan. This is a new

phase in our church life in which Redeemer will spread out and move deeper into the city. This next step will include identifying and equipping pastoral and cultural leaders, creating three separate but related congregations that are rooted in neighborhoods through ministry centers, and empowering our congregants to serve New York and build community.

The key way to understand our vision as a church is to join a Beta Group on or before September 27. These groups will have 8 to 10 people and will meet at locations all around the city for seven weeks to process the vision we believe God has given our church. They are also the place where you can learn more about how you could fit into the next chapter of Redeemer's story.

More than ever, and a key element of the campaign, is the need for congregants to step forward, learn about who God is and what he is doing in New York, and consider committing more of themselves to his work here. So, to find out more about what God is up to at Redeemer, join a Beta Group:

www.redeemer.com/betagroups



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“RENEW” CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

On September 27 as we celebrate our twentieth anniversary, we will launch a Vision Campaign about remembering our hope for the city and renewing our pledge to love and serve it. Redeemer has had this vision for two decades and now we will launch the first phase in a 10-year-plan, a next step in our church life in which Redeemer will decentralize and continue to move out into the city. Follow the campaign on twitter.com: @RedeemerNYC.

BOOK REVIEW: GOOD NEWS ABOUT INJUSTICE

As Christians, we find our lives being played out in two continually unfolding and paradoxical realities; that evil has been triumphed over by Christ and His victorious cross, putting evil to open shame; yet at the same time, we see that evils grip seems only to be tightening on the world. For those of us who feel this tension, Gary Haugen has written *The Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage In A Hurting World*.

In *The Good News About Injustice*, Gary Haugen, founder and CEO of International Justice Mission (IJM) lays out a comprehensive theology of justice and

injustice, his experiences as a UN Investigator, what the Scriptures say, and how we are called to respond as Christians. The bulk of the book lies, I believe, in the middle, chapters 4-7, where Haugen makes four affirmations about the nature and character of God that are crucial to understand if we are to fulfill what God has asked of us; 1) God loves justice and, conversely, hates injustice, 2) God has compassion for those who suffer injustice—everywhere around the world, without distinction or favor, 3) God judges and condemns those who perpetrate injustice, and 4) God seeks active justice for

those who suffer injustice. But the book does not end there, with a big, nice sounding theology, Haugen draws us into the fight, everyday people, providing practical tools, insight, and ways to truly become ambassadors of Christ with a ministry and message of reconciliation.

The passionate plea of *The Good News About Injustice* calls out to those who desire a Christianity that risks, that dares and that desires not a domesticated Christ, but one who is out in the darkest corners of the earth, weeping that His children are suffering and that so few are there to stand in the gap, to intercede and to restore.