# Introduction

## I am going to do something different today. I want to leverage today’s text and Dr. King’s example to set a vision in front of you. I suspect it will be a bit disruptive and raise a lot of questions than I’m not able to answer, but that’s OK. My goal at the moment is to get you thinking, dreaming and praying.

## As you may know, over the last year a team of staff, elders and deacons has been looking ahead, working on next steps, praying for direction. That work is not done – we do not have a buttoned-up plan – but I have a sense that it’s time it’s time to start sharing some of what is coming into focus. And the anniversary of Dr. King’s birth and the words of Christ in our text set this up better than I could ever hope for.

## As you will see, I believe we are at a crossroads and, more importantly, I believe there is more that we are called to do – invited to do. I believe that when we die and meet God there are things we will be glad we did and things we’ll wonder why we didn’t do. And so, I want to introduce some of the things the staff, elders and deacons have been wrestling with. Then I’m going to invite you to join me in a period of fasting and prayer.

# To set this in context, let me direct you to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 4:38f.

## We are working our way through the report Luke complied for Theophilus. It is both an orderly account of the life, claims, teaching, example and sacrifice of Christ, and an effort to persuade us to believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

## At the moment we’re in a brief series based out of Luke 4 and 5, focusing on the amazing things Christ did early in his ministry to make it clear that he was not just another teacher or even simply a moral reformer like Dr. King – or Nelson Mandella, Ghandi, Mother Theresa. Like them, Jesus worked to promote a more just society and to care for the poor and oppressed. But He did more than that and He claimed to be more than that.

## In the first week of Amazed we looked at his claim to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Last week we saw him demonstrate his power over evil. Today he announces his plans – which are to bring a whole new, upside down, gracious order to the world. He intended to change everything.

# I invite you to turn to our text. It’s Luke 4:38-44.

## Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.

## 40 At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.

## 42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

# We are going to focus on verse 43 – his statement about “the good news of the kingdom of God.” It is worth noting a few things first.

## Verse 40 says that Jesus healed all of those who were brought to him. Some were afflicted by evil spirits, some were sick. He healed them all. Healing is a big part of his ministry during the early years and part of the reason he draws such big crowds. In an era before helpful medicine – when doctors were more likely to kill you than cure you – word about someone who could heal you traveled quickly. Leprosy? Cancer? Blindness? A touch from Jesus was all it took. People came from all over to get to him. We’ll focus on healing in a couple weeks when we come to a longer section on it.

## Verse 41 says that many of the demons Jesus was casting out were yelling that He was the Son of God but “he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.” We’ll see more of this in the days ahead as well. In brief, Jesus does not want to be identified as the Messiah until he’s had more time to define exactly what kind of Messiah he was going to be.[[1]](#footnote-1) More on that later as well.

## Third, I’d be crazy to let verse 42 get away. “At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place.” A few weeks ago I noted that it was Christ’s habit to attend weekly worship services. Here we learn that he got up early in order to spend time in prayer and reflection with His Father. We’ll see this over and over again. And so I’ll say again, twenty minutes a day will rock your world. Ten minutes of Bible reading and ten minutes of prayer every day will help form you in the ways you want and need to be formed.

### Two weeks ago a man stopped me in the lobby and with tears in his eyes thanked me for the changes God was doing in his life. He said, “You told me to spend ten minutes a day reading the Bible and ten minutes praying and that has been revolutionary. It’s changed everything.”

### Look, I know you’re busy. I spoke about this on Friday at Men’s Fraternity. Virtually everyone in this room has money. Some more than others, but virtually everyone in this room has money. And money brings options and options almost always make us busy. Well, I do not care how busy you are, you’ve got twenty minutes a day, and twenty minutes over time will change the lens through which you see everything and help shape you in ways that work.

# OK, on to verse 43.

## As is often the case, every sentence of this passage could lead to a series of sermons. But today I want to focus on Christ’s comments about his purpose. He was healing people, doing miracles, the people are swarming around him. They didn’t want him to stop. Eventually things end for the night, but you can be sure that their thought is that they will pick right back up in the morning. But very early Jesus slips away to pray, and when the people find him he tells them that he’s move on. “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” In other words: I’m not here to offer temporary help – health for today. I am glad to help you while I’m here. I’m glad to heal you. But that is not my main calling. I am here to bring eternal help. I am here to fix things. I’m here to introduce a new way that will eventually change everything.

## We associate “good news” with the Gospel. In fact, “gospel” means “good news.” Just so you know, there is a debate about exactly what the “good news” includes. In fact, I was in this conversation again this week. One of our interns – who attends Trinity – is taking an evangelism class at another seminary downtown. I said, “Well, that will be interesting. I’d love to hear how they define the Gospel. What is the message?” When we talked at the end of this week he said, “it’s all about social action.” Well, people helping others, caring for the poor and oppressed, is a good thing. But it’s not the Gospel. If you leave out the death of Christ and all that accomplished – the opportunity to be forgiven and gain eternal life – well, that is fatally truncated message.

## Now I think it’s clear from what Jesus said, “I’m here to bring good news about the kingdom of God,” that this is not a “pray this prayer so that when you die you can go to Heaven. I don’t really care what happens between now and then – what you do between now and then. See you later. Good luck.” That is also a tragic distortion, a gross misrepresentation of all the is implied by “Good News.”

## Let me remind you, we list our mission as to Proclaim the Good News and Engage in Good Works. Not one or the other. Both. We argue that there is a logical priority to the order. Evangelism is listed first, not because spiritual needs are more important than physical ones, but because: 1) eternal matters are more important than temporal ones – which is implied in Christ’s need to move on from the crowd in today’s passage; 2) there are lots of people doing good works, whereas the church is the only one telling others about Christ; and 3) if you want to change the world it helps to start with people who have been changed. For all the knocks Christians take – many of them deserved – those who follow Christ give a lot more money away and donate a lot more of their time than others. So if you want to change the world start by changing people. I would argue that evangelism needs to be listed first, but our assignment includes both and efforts to separate them don’t do justice to our call.

## The world is broken and it needs God and all that He offers. Things are not as they should be. People are not as they should be. Evil is real. There is pain and suffering. Death. Things that should be valued are not. Things that should not be valued are. The effects of sin are everywhere. We need a whole new paradigm. Jesus said, I have come to bring just that.

## He came to defeat evil, pay off moral debt and bring a new order.

## Let me frame it this way. At a high level the story the Bible tells is bookended by good – by a world that works. Everything is good in the first couple chapters of Genesis and everything is good in the last couple chapters of Revelation. But in between it’s a mess. Christ came to die for our sins and to introduce a new way. Our assignment is to point to Christ and follow the path he set out. When he returns He will finish His work. The promise is that one day He will return, this time in power, and when he does the effects of sin will be removed.

## There is a lot of debate about this: 1) when will he return; 2) how will He return; 3) what leads up to his return; 4) exactly what will happen. There are lots of debates about how to answer these questions. A while ago I started to grow tired of them. It’s pretty clear that we cannot answer most of them. And that is not where we are supposed to focus. It’s not like we need to know more in order to do what we’ve been called to do.

# A couple months ago I found myself unsettled and trying to make sense of things – big picture and immediate. When I get confused I start listing what I know for sure. For our purposes, three things emerged.

## One: We have an assignment. We have marching orders – the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Share and Serve. I not only backed up to our mission statement – which we take seriously. I referenced it earlier: Our mission is to lead people into life-changing relationships with God and others by Proclaiming the Good News and Engaging in Good Works. It’s brief and bold. It helps us focus and we repeat it often. But I actually backed up a step further, reminding myself that rather than think that we have a mission, we need to realize that God’s mission has a church. We are not the ones who set the agenda. We exist for His glory not the other way around. We are to carry out His plan. We are expected to tell others about Christ and care for them – to live into the vision, to embrace the values and ethics of the Kingdom and help it spread.

### There are days when I question the wisdom of His plan. In fact, I often think that there has to be a better way than the church. But on days when it’s working – when the people of God, filled with His Spirit and informed by His plan are using their gifts to Proclaim the Good News and Engage in Good Works – it’s a beautiful thing. There is nothing like it. God’s people. God’s church. God’s plan. It cannot be stopped. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

## The second thing I am certain of is that we have much to be thankful for.

### You were handed the 2013 annual report today. It makes this point in a handful of ways – with quotes and graphs and pictures and numbers. We’ve enjoyed a string of good years and are coming off a strong fall.

#### People of all ages are placing their faith in Christ or making decisions to follow him more diligently.

#### Baptisms, small group participation and volunteer service hours are all at record levels.

#### During the last seven years attendance has climbed and debt has fallen. When you count adults and children at both campuses we are bumping up against 2,000. We are about to be out of debt for the first time since the early 80s.

#### We have a great staff who do a lot of hard work.

#### We are investing more money in global missions than ever before.

#### We – you – are helping more under-resourced people in Lake County than ever before.

#### We are helping other churches.

### I could go on. Suffice it to say, we’re in a good spot. We are not perfect. All is not right. There are lots of problems and there is lots of pain, but there is much to celebrate. God has been very gracious with us.

## Three: It’s time for change. The third thing I am certain of is that change is called for. This might surprise you. Much is going well. We are growing. That sounds like, “stay the course.” But I believe we need to make some changes and I think this for a few reasons:

### Some have to do with life-cycles and organizational dynamics. This is a side of a local church that not many people think about but someone has to. Suffice it to say in some predictable, common ways, the size of the church, the way we are organized and the buildings themselves are beginning to restrict what we do or how we do it.

### Another has to do with the fact that we are just over thirty years old. This is something to note because very few churches grow after they hit thirty. (Graph)

### I could talk more about these issues. They are significant but they are not very interesting. And they pale compared to the chief reason I believe we need to change. The key reason I think we should change is because there is so much more to do than is presently being done.

#### Eighty-three percent of the people living in Lake County do not attend church anywhere – that is close to 600,000 people – and the number is growing.[[2]](#footnote-2) There is a staggering amount of pain and hopelessness out there.

#### If we are serious about bringing the good news of the kingdom of God to people – if we are serious about our desire to “touch and transform” our local communities with God’s love – we need to make some adjustments.

#### More of the same will not do it. Seven, eight, ten percent annual growth is not going to move the needle.

## Now, let me pause here and say:

### I’m not raising money. I’m not announcing any definitive plans. And I do not have answers to any of your questions about next steps.

### Let me also be clear, I am not implying that: we need to do things to earn God’s love; that we have the ability to fix this broken world or that God needs our help.

## What I am doing today – on this Martin Luther King weekend, on a day when our text says, Christ said he must “proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent” – is asking you to dream. What I’m asking you to think about is what might happen if we leaned further in to our assignment? What might happen if we more effectively mobilized and deployed Christ followers, if we turned up the evangelistic climate a few degrees, if we championed the cause of the weak, sacrificially loved and served the poor? What might happen if we pressed ahead in courageous – even reckless – obedience rather than moved forward in a measured, safe pace? What might happen if we lived today more in light of eternity than retirement?

## I’ve shared my greatest fear before. I do not struggle with anxiety around preaching or budget short-falls, but I lose sleep wondering if we are being good stewards of the great gifts entrusted to us. Christ Church has more than its share of eight, nine and ten talent people – and not all of them (not all of you) are delivering eight, nine and ten talent kingdom results.

## Some are! I am routinely encouraged by how many of you quietly serve with humility and joy. But does anyone doubt that we could do more? Does anyone doubt that when we meet God we will wish we had done more? We have an opportunity to move into greater levels of service, faithfulness and joy. We have a chance to see more people come to faith, grow and be cared for. What if the next three years took us to a different level of impact? What if we decided to be more fully invested in the assignment, more radically shaped by eternity?

## What I’ve been working on is a plan for the next 1,000 days. One that grows out of our assignment and the StratPlan Team’s work. It’s not done. The elders and deacons haven’t approved anything. We’re not ready to bring anything to the membership for a vote. But it seems prudent to share some of what is being discussed. It has two parts – one around Good News and one around Good Works.

# Let me start with the second. On the Good Works part:

## The goal is to get more people serving – for all manner of reasons

### This is what we are called to! Serving is not something we do as a favor for others. Jesus served and instructed us to do the same. The Apostle Paul modeled service, told us that we’ve been gifted to serve and wrote, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” We need to serve because that is God’s plan. We need to serve because there are real needs out there. We need to serve to soften our own heart. Those who serve have their heart shaped in ways pleasing to God. Everyone wins when we serve, starting with us.

### We need to serve because serving is one of the things that softens people to the Gospel.[[3]](#footnote-3) I got into a conversation with someone at the health club the other day. He was not a fan of the church. He was not a fan of the claims of Christ. About the only thing that slowed him down was the work we are doing. I asked him, “what do you think the church should be doing?” He rattled off a handful of things. It was very helpful to be able to say, “the Big C church does that and has for hundreds of years. And the local congregation where I serve also does all of that. I believe that increasingly this will be key.

### We need to serve for all kinds of reasons.

## I’d like to see the number of service hours directed outside the walls of this church double in three years – from 10,000 to 20,000.

### These are hours where we serve at Forrestal, Love INC, PADS, the Changing Closet. All of you are serving – you are serving your family and friends: Moms are caring for sick kids and chauffeuring them around. You are shoveling your neighbor’s driveway, cleaning the office kitchen when no one else will. Many of you are serving in all manner of ways. God bless you. Don’t stop. But I’m not talking about that. I’m not even talking about serving inside the walls of the church: small group leaders, Sunday School teachers, ushers, greeters and 100 other things. I am talking about doubling the hours of service outside the walls of the church.

## I think a big part of those hours – not all but a big part – need to focus on North Chicago, because:

### It’s an area of significant material need and it’s nearby. As we have grown larger we have a growing number of people from North Chicago attending here and we have people who attend here moving to North Chicago. There are many wonderful people living in North Chicago, including many who are spiritually rich. But the city is pulled down by high unemployment, crime, gangs, failing schools and violence.

### And many people who attend here desperately need their hearts broken by the reality of the pain and poverty that is right here.

### We are uniquely positioned to link the North Shore with North Chicago.

## If you were to ask me today what does that look like, I think it looks like a significant investment in housing because:

### We are positioned for this. We have a good number of bankers, builders, realtors and developers who want to use their gifts and abilities to serve – who have been meeting and piloting some steps forward.

### Because while there are other big needs, there are other churches and groups that are already providing point leadership in education and food. We do not need to compete with anyone on this.[[4]](#footnote-4)

### Housing makes a difference. Children who live in a home owned by their parents are far more likely to succeed in school than those who do not. People who live in a home they own are more invested in their home and neighborhood than those who do not.

## I think a second area would be economic development

### People need jobs. At the end of the day North Chicago only thrives when the people thrive. And the people only thrive when they have real jobs.

### Remodeling homes will create some jobs – and the plan would be to leverage those opportunities to train people in some of the trades.

### But we can do more than that. We have lots of business minded people – entrepreneurs who could mentor people trying to start or grow a business. I think a second piece of the Good Works initiative is about economic development.

# Let me move now to the second major initiative – the one linked to Proclaiming the Good News. Here I believe it’s time to expand to additional sites.

## As most of you know, we became a multisite church three years ago when we merged with the Evangelical Church of Highland Park. We are now one church that meets in multiple locations – we have one statement of faith, one budget, one name, one staff, one elder and one deacon boards, but we meet in more than one location. I am proposing that we open additional locations.

## There are a variety of reasons for this, but the principle one is to reach more people.

### We’re starting to bump into some space constraints at key times. We’ve stayed ahead of that by starting new services. We now have seven. Two of those are at capacity nearly every week. Two are comfortably full. Three have plenty of room. But we are running out of times to start additional services.

### Another good reason to start new services is to get more people in the game. When we start a new campus the people who help launch it grow. They serve more, give more, pray more, bring their friends more often – it’s a time of great growth for them.

## But the key reason to start a new campus is to reach more people. And new churches – healthy, growing churches, externally-focused churches – are a key way to reach more people.

## There is more that I might say. A few other matters we are exploring, such as how we can help other congregations grow. Most churches are not growing. Something around 85 – 90 percent of churches are stagnant or declining. How can we help them? But I’ve said enough. Let me end with a call to pray.

## What we need is to hear God on this. We have been praying and seeking that plan, but I want to invite all of you to join in that.

1. Perhaps in part because He did not want their help – he did not want them claiming any contributions to his work. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The church in the United States is in decline. The global church is growing. In fact, all in Christianity is growing more rapidly than Islam, atheism or any other worldview. But not in this country. The church in the United States is losing people and influence. Eighty-five percent of churches in North America have plateaued or are declining, and fewer than one person in five is in church on any given weekend. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Matthew 5:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. God has been at work in North Chicago for a long time. North Chicago Community Partners is doing transformative work in education. The Chapel is partnering with the Northern Illinois Food Bank to end hunger. A coalition of groups is working to bring a supermarket to town. There are many who are doing great work. We want to compliment – never compete – with these groups. One of the reasons **to** choos**e** housing is because a new group – The Fuller Center for Housing – is just getting started. We like their plan and believe we can be a helpful ally in the work they intend to focus on. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)