

# Reconciling All Things

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning. I'm Tommy. I'm the rector here. We've been in a series for the past couple of weeks. This is September. This is a time in D.C. where it feels like things kick off.

We sort of unofficially abide by the academic year here culturally. And so we always take a few weeks in September to kind of reset, remember who we are as a church, why we're here.

So we've been looking at our mission as a church. We've been around since about 15 years, since late 2007, early 2008. And we're here basically to do three things as a church.

We're here, we say that our church exists to join people to God, to join people to one another, and to join people to Christ's work of renewal in Washington, D.C., and through it, the world.

And so the last couple of weeks, we looked at the first two parts of that statement, joining people to God, the gospel, and then joining people to one another, the work of community building.

[ 1 : 0 2 ]     And now we're going to look at the third and final piece, that we're here to join in and to join other people into Christ's work of renewal in Washington, D.C., and through it, the world.

And so essentially, our mission is to join into Jesus' mission. So in order to understand that, we're going to look more at this amazing passage written by Paul to the Colossians, chapter 1, verses 15 to 23.

We're going to look first at Jesus' mission, which we see in verses 15 to 20, and then our mission that flows out of that, which we see in verse 21 to 23. So Jesus' mission, and then our mission that flows out of His mission.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for Your Word, and we thank You for being the kind of God who speaks through Your Word. And we're coming from all different kinds of places.

We have different questions and hesitations and thoughts and concerns and distractions. Lord, I pray that by Your grace, we would be able to attend to You and that You would speak. And we pray that in Your speaking, we would come face to face with Your living Word, Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 1 0 ]     Lord, and that we would be changed in that encounter. We pray this in Your Son's holy name. Amen. So first of all, I want to look a bit at Jesus' mission. Paul is making three massive statements about Jesus Christ that become the foundation for much of what we believe and do as Christians.

The first thing that he says about Jesus is this. Everything was made by and for Jesus Christ. Everything was made by Him.

Everything was made for Him. There was a survey put out this year, 2022, by Ligonier. Lord, you are having to ask for... God is Village from the Holy Age. You are well enough. But, you know, we have... I think that Jesus is demonrune, reality, industry LGBTQ. It would sound like the same thing.

Pretty much, holy ending. It's synonymous with Christianity, announcing in it that same thing. Our Dailyve bandwidth. I know it was  $\pi$  crazy. in 2022 in our society. One statistic was that 73% of evangelicals believe that Jesus was created by God. 73% of evangelicals believe that Jesus was created by God. I can only think it's because people maybe get confused about verse 15. Verse 15 says, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. So, it's possible that people read that and they think, well, firstborn means that God must have given birth to Him at some point in a cosmic sense. But what we need to understand is that when Paul uses this word, firstborn, he's talking about status. When Paul uses this word, he's always talking about status. And so, Jesus outranks everything else in creation. He's over all of creation. That's what Paul is saying. And in case there's any doubt about that, we go to the next verse, which says, verse 16, for by Him all things were created.

Right? So, if you have two columns, right, not created and created, and when we put all things in this category, all things that are created, then where do we put Jesus? Well, if by Him all things were created, then He must be in the other column. So, He's not created. So, Jesus, as Paul understands Him, has always been. He's co-eternal, as we say, with the Father. By things, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible, invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through Him and for Him. So, this is the first thing we need to understand. God did not create Jesus. That's actually a heresy that's been around for a long time.

[ 4 : 44 ] It's called Arianism. It's still popular today among some groups like Jehovah's Witnesses and apparently evangelicals, but it's something that goes back a couple of thousand years, and Paul is directly challenging that when he says what he says about Jesus. So, Jesus has always existed from eternity. The second thing that we learn about Jesus from Paul, everything holds together in Jesus Christ. Everything holds together in Jesus. So, he's saying, Jesus gives the universe order, and He fills it with meaning and coherence. He didn't just create the universe and then step back and say, well, this will be interesting to see how this turns out. He is actively holding it together, managing it, making it work. And so, what Paul is saying is that right now, at this very moment, Jesus is actively holding the universe together. He's actively holding us together.

And, you know, this is important because as Christians, we tend to separate in our minds the sacred and the secular, and we sort of assign a domain within life to God, but then we imagine there's a lot of other things that are happening outside of the religious or the spiritual. So, we sort of think of spirituality as like one compartment in the bento box of life. And what Paul is saying is that there's only one compartment in existence, and that compartment is Christ. So, everything that exists in that compartment of Christ. All things exist and hold together in Him. So, all galaxies, all solar systems, all planets, all nations, all governments, all societies, all neighborhoods, all churches, all people, all cells, atoms, protons, quarks, they all hold together in Christ.

It's a pretty big statement. And then the third thing he says is everything will be reconciled by Jesus Christ. So, you say, well, why is there a need for reconciliation? Well, when through Jesus all things were created, that world that was created was meant to exist in perfect harmony.

But Jesus has to respond to something that we have done in the world. Human beings rejected God in order to live for ourselves. And what we see right beginning in Genesis chapter 3, the third chapter of the whole Bible, is that this rebellion resulted in profound relational breakdown, or what we would refer to as alienation. Alienation. And we see this in Genesis 3. For the first time, human beings are alienated from God. Imagine four concentric circles, right? In that innermost circle, human beings are alienated from God. So, after the fall, instead of intimacy with God, instead of walking with God in the cool of the day in the garden, Adam and Eve hide from God, and they're cast out of the garden.

We also see in the next concentric circle out, alienation from ourselves. And you say, well, that's an odd thought to be alienated from myself. Well, instead of openness, vulnerability, we have shame. We have deception. We have a capacity now for self-deception. We have potentially the emergence of an unconscious part of ourselves, a part that has a lot of say in who we are and how we live, but a part that we don't have access to. We have a kind of inner psychic alienation.

[ 8 : 28 ] Imagine the next concentric circle out. These are like ripples, right? The stone of the fall going into the water and the ripples emanating out, or the stone hitting the ice and the cracks, right? Moving outward to the next concentric circle out, alienation from one another.

Instead of love and trust and friendship and intimacy and vulnerability, Adam and Eve begin to shift blame and accuse one another. Human relationships become a power struggle. Her desire will be for you to consume you, but you will rule over her. Alienation from the world, instead of the last circle out, alienation from the world, instead of our work, our vocation coming easily, sort of working in God-glorifying ways and it coming easily, humans have to contend with thorns and thistles.

You all have jobs, you all have vocations, and they all have difficulties. You have to contend with futility. No matter how good you do, no matter how hard you try, what you build will ultimately break down and decay. Somebody will come along who's better than you and replace you. Your name at some point will be forgotten. Futility, entropy, decay. Childbirth and reproduction are going to be hard and painful. There are going to be many people who want to have kids who can't. Instead of stewarding creation, we now have environmental degradation and exploitation. So, all of these relationships are broken. God, self, others, world. And I would chance to say that any kind of brokenness or struggle that you can think of in the world fits into one or more of these sort of four categories of alienation.

But through the cross, and this is what Paul is saying, through the cross, Jesus is reconciling all things to himself. He's reconciling us, and he's reconciling the world to himself through the cross. So, he's reconciling us to God. Spiritual renewal through the cross. He's reconciling us to ourselves, making us whole again. Personal renewal. He's reconciling us to one another. Social renewal.

And he's reconciling us ultimately to the world. Cultural or cosmic renewal. So, this is the scope of Jesus' mission. It is massive, and yet it is also highly personal. It begins with you and me, and it goes out to the furthest galaxies that we are only now able to see with the James Webb telescope. It covers all of it. Jesus is doing all of it because he holds all of it together.

[ 11 : 08 ] And that's really the point that Paul is trying to make here. He's saying, listen, the world is broken. We all know that. Jesus Christ is the only one who can put it right again. How do we know? He's the one who made it. He's the one who holds it together. So, he's the only one who can fix it. Now, what's our part in all of this? That's Jesus' mission. What's our role in Jesus' mission? Well, in verses 21, 22, and 23, Paul says, listen, this work of reconciliation isn't just theoretical. It's theoretical. It's already begun. And he's essentially saying to the Colossians, it's already begun. And the way you know that this is happening is because it has happened in you.

You're a case study of what this reconciliation looks like. He says, once you were alienated, you were hostile in mind, you were doing evil deeds, but through the cross, Jesus has reconciled you to God. It's already beginning, and it's happening in you right now. And now the same gospel that is at work in you is healing the whole world. It's healing the whole world. And essentially, we're called to join into that. We're called to participate in the healing of the world with Jesus.

And so, that's what our mission statement means when we talk about joining Christ's work of renewal. Right? I think if we said, well, we're here to renew D.C., that would be highly grandiose.

It would be a bit arrogant, and it would also be completely unrealistic because we can't renew D.C. I can't even renew myself on a Saturday afternoon if it's just me. Right? But we are participating in something that Jesus and only Jesus can do. And he's saying the same gospel is at work in all of this.

So, think back to those four kinds of reconciliation and renewal that we just talked about. That's how we think of the work of renewal that we're called to do in the church with Jesus. And so, the first kind of renewal that we seek to bring about here in the city is the work of spiritual renewal.

[ 13 : 21 ] Spiritual renewal. One of the main ways we do that is through public faith and evangelism. You know, one of the aims of our church, one of my hopes, every year I go out to West Virginia and I sit on a deck and I look out over the Shenandoah Valley at the Allegheny Mountains, and I look at the river, and I look at the trees, and I pray about the coming year and what I hope for for our church.

And every single year, one of the things I pray is that there would be more conversions, that we would see more people come to faith. And that sounds like an outdated and archaic thing to say, but that continues to be my prayer every year that we see more people come to faith in Jesus.

And, you know, I think that makes a lot of Christians these days very uncomfortable. The idea of public faith and evangelism makes us very kind of squeamish to think about it.

A survey I saw recently, at least half of Christian millennials surveyed actually believe it's wrong for people to share their faith in the hopes of converting others. So, about half of Christian millennials who would self-identify as church-going Christians believe it's actually wrong to share one's faith. And, you know, I think that there are some understandable reasons for this. It sounds like I'm beating up on Christians and evangelicals. I'm not. I think that actually this is understandable.

Talking about faith is a lot more complicated now than it was a generation ago. It's actually a lot more complicated than it was when we started our church in 2008, especially if you live in a place like Washington, D.C. A generation ago, Christianity was mainly seen as a good thing. I mean, even if you weren't a Christian, most people kind of agreed, well, I think Christianity is kind of a force for good in the world, and I'm glad Christians are around, even though I'm not a Christian. But the prevailing narrative now is that Christianity is a kind of scourge of society. People point to things like the abuse scandals in various denominations, the church's complicity in things like slavery and Jim Crow. They point to evangelical politics. They point to views on things like sexuality and gender, and they say, and all of these things are kind of front and center right now in the cultural imagination. So, I think for the average person like you or me just sort of sitting there looking at the world, the idea of having a public faith and doing the work of evangelism just feels like a massive, massively unattainable thing, right? It feels like there are all of these insurmountable obstacles. I think most Christians probably living in D.C. are pretty sheepish about our faith.

[ 15 : 51 ] You know, we treat it kind of like a secret identity, you know? But here's the thing, even though the culture has changed, the good news of the gospel has not changed, right? The mission of Jesus to reconcile people to God has not changed, and that is actually ongoing every bit as much today as it was 2,000 years ago. And the Holy Spirit is still at work in people's hearts in ways that will shock and amaze us if we open our eyes and ears to recognize what God is doing. And Christians are still called to be witnesses. That essentially means pointing to what we have seen and heard and experienced with Jesus and saying, I know you may have all of these objections, but let me just tell you, let me just tell you what's happened in my life. Let me just tell you what I've seen in the lives of the people around me. And so we ask this question, what's it going to take for us to be a church full of people who are willing to have a public faith, just to let people know that we're Christians, to open that door, to mention that we're part of a church, just to create that, just to crack the door open so that if people are curious, they might want to take a step in.

Right? What's it going to take? I think training is certainly highly valuable. Training in lots of ways, just learning how to recognize the prevailing cultural assumptions, the prevailing philosophical influences on the modern world, the reasons behind why people think the way they think, the assumptions that we make that are unexamined. Very valuable.

I think having an outward-facing church culture that welcomes seekers and skeptics, a place where there's... no question is treated as off-limits, where people are free to have doubts and uncertainties, I think that's tremendously valuable. To present the gospel and teach the Bible in ways that are coherent and intelligible to people, even if it's their first time listening, I think that's tremendously valuable. But I think the biggest obstacle, if I'm honest, the biggest obstacle to evangelism is in our hearts. It's in our hearts, and I think in order to overcome that, we really need that kind of unique combination of humility and boldness that you can only find as a fruit of the gospel working in your life. You know, there's a humility that comes that is necessary when we try to listen and understand people who voice their frustrations and objections and anger about Christians in the church without getting defensive. That requires an enormous amount of humility because we're likely to take it very personally otherwise. And that kind of humility comes from, as Paul says, the truth that we were all at one time hostile and alienated from God, and it's only by the grace of Christ that we're not. And so, it's this posture that says, listen, you know, you're maybe more honest than I have been about some of the frustrations and anger that you feel. And my job is just to sit here and absorb and to listen, and rather than defending myself, I want to attend to you. But there's also a boldness that's needed. There's a boldness to be willing to look foolish for the sake of the gospel. I mean, Paul is probably one of the most foolish religious leaders in history. He's constantly being mocked and made fun of, and he writes about it all the time because he preaches the foolishness of the cross. And so, we need a kind of boldness to be willing to allow that to happen and to look foolish, and that comes from knowing that we have the eternal approval of the only one whose approval really matters, and it's okay to look foolish.

Right? So, this is the work of spiritual renewal, having a public faith, seeking to see others come into relationship with God. And then we move out from that, and we begin to look at the next concentric circle out. We're also invested in the work of personal renewal here at Church of the Advent.

This is another way that we join into Christ's work of renewal, is basically seeking to be renewed ourselves, psychologically, emotionally, to be emotionally healthy disciples. We did a whole section on that a year ago, emotionally healthy discipleship. What does that mean? Some people would say, well, what does that have to do with anything, and what especially does that have to do with mission? Well, it's interesting. In 1 Peter 2 verse 12, Peter's talking to Christians who are facing hostility and persecution, probably living in settings similar to where most of us live.

[ 20 : 17 ] And he says this, "Live such good lives among the unbelievers that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us." It's going to be hard to convince someone that the gospel can change their life if there's no evidence that has changed my life. You know, I think a lot of Christians are tempted to convince people around us that we're no different from them. You know, there's a kind of scrambling to say, oh, you know, I know I'm a Christian, but I'm not like those Christians, and in fact, I'm a lot like you, and I do... I like a lot of the things that you like and do a lot of the things that you do, and we're trying to break down those walls, and I think there's a good impulse there for sure.

But I think it's easy to miss that there are a whole lot of people out there who are wanting something to be different. They're wanting to see people who are different. They're wanting to see communities that are different. They have looked at all of the other options, and it's all the same.

And they're hoping against hope that when they look at this group of Christians who claim that the gospel is changing everything, they're hoping against hope that there's something there that is different.

And maybe it's offensive, and maybe it's hard to stomach, and maybe it forces them to kind of re-examine a lot of their own assumptions, but it is different. It's different.

So, I think as we think about our own community, we need to ask these questions. On the one hand, are we open? Are we the kind of place where people can come into our community and feel welcome and ask questions and have doubts? But on the other hand, are we distinct?

[ 21 : 58 ] You know, as Jesus says, are we salty? Have we lost our saltiness, or do we continue to be salt for the world? Do we continue to be people that act as a kind of preservative against decay, that bring out and enhance all that is good and true and beautiful wherever we are? You know, are we salty? You know, when I came to faith in college, there was one guy in our friend group who was like a serious Christian. And I grew up in the South and went to college in the South, and so, you know, we were all, as Flannery O'Connor says, Christ haunted.

But this one guy was a serious Christian, and in our friend group, we all used to make fun of him. I mean, he was a good guy, but it was regular sport to make fun of him, because he wasn't out trying to hook up with people every weekend like the rest of us were. You know, he would drink some, but he never really, drank too much or got out of control. He refused to look at porn. He was serious about church involvement, would sometimes, you know, regularly invite us to go do things, and we never would.

And he would sometimes not do things with us because he was doing stuff with his church. And so, all these kind of became opportunities for us to do what any good group of friends would do, to just relentlessly make fun of him. But here's what I remember about this. In all of my immaturity, right, you know, the main thing that I remember about him is that in the midst of all that, he was just a genuinely kind person.

He was just genuinely kind. And I always felt like, this guy is for me. Like, even when I'm being immature and joking and making fun of him, he really cares about me. He's really for me. He's really interested in who I am as a person.

And that's the thing that really stood out most and is maybe the most, one of the most distinctly Christian aspects of who he was, is just his genuine love for me. And I remember even when I would join in the making jokes about him, deep down, I think I was jealous of him.

[ 23 : 56 ] Because it seemed like there was something in his life that mattered more, that was more valuable and more precious than anything that I had in my life. And I think that that was a kind of indictment of me.

It highlighted and exposed my emptiness. And so, he was the guy that I ended up sitting down with to talk about Jesus, you know, which is how I eventually came to faith.

So, I think even when people are poking fun and mocking and accusing, I think deep down there are at least some people in whom God is at work who are wanting there to be something different and distinct, who are receptive if we're willing to recognize it.

The third ring out is the ring of social renewal. So, we have spiritual renewal, relationship with God. We have personal renewal. Are we being renewed? Are we salty and distinct? And then the third ring out as we think about Church of the Advent is the work of social renewal.

The work of social renewal includes doing all of the things that we can do to try to repair the social fabric of our society. Our society is deeply fragmented.

[ 25 : 10 ] I don't have to tell you that. And, you know, there are some ancient divisions that we have been trying to overcome that have been exacerbated in our society, divisions along the lines of race, class, politics, gender.

Those have been around for a while. But I think one thing that's changing is that our ability to navigate our differences, our ability to work through our differences, has been greatly diminished.

That's something that I think is different from when we started the church 15 years ago. Our ability to navigate difference is actually greatly diminished. In my opinion, our society is becoming increasingly illiberal on both sides of the aisle for different reasons.

One of the things that's different is that now ideas themselves are considered harmful and toxic. So, we live in a society based on philosophical liberalism, and one of the core ideas there is that if we're willing to openly debate and challenge one another's ideas, that the best ideas will emerge in our common pursuit of truth.

We don't really see that anymore. We see ideas, words, concepts being treated as toxic, as sources of harm and trauma. And what that means is that people's approach to ideas they don't like is not so much to engage in debate, it's quarantine, right?

[ 26 : 27 ] It's a kind of ideological germophobia where we want to quarantine ourselves from certain ideological viruses that might, in fact, contaminate and destroy.

And so, there's this sort of justification for living within a kind of intellectual bubble, an echo chamber, because we're quarantining ourselves. And so, we're losing the ability to work through our differences.

And I think since COVID, all this has gotten a lot worse. You know, I think we're all experiencing what Andy Crouch called rapidly shrinking circles of trust. I wonder if that resonates with any of you.

It certainly resonates with me. We're all wondering, where are my people? Where are my people? Who are the people who genuinely care about me and understand me? Who are the people I can feel safe enough to share my views with?

Maybe five years ago, there would have been a lot of people who said, well, I feel like that way in my church. I feel that way in my family. Now, that's not the case. There are a lot of people who look around their church with a posture of fear.

[ 27 : 34 ] The walls are up. People are guarded. You're afraid of a topic like January 6th. There are masks or something else comes up. Critical race theory. You're afraid if any of these topics come up, you're not sure what you're going to say because you're not sure how they're going to react to you.

You maybe have been in a small group for 10 years, but all of a sudden, there's a no-fly zone sign on lots of these topics where you think, I'm not sure I'm safe with this person.

Diminishing circles of trust. Right? And so, this is hard, and I think that acknowledging it and acknowledging the further fragmentation of churches and families is something that we need to do.

But this presents a massive opportunity for the church. The church is one of the only remaining institutions where you see people from different races and classes and life stages and political affiliations all coming together.

And the church is the only institution where we have a foundation for unity that supersedes all of these things. Right? All of the things that might otherwise divide us because they define us no longer define us, and so they don't have to divide us.

[ 28 : 43 ] I sound like Dr. Seuss. But what I'm saying is that we have a new identity in Christ that supersedes all of these things. And what that does is it allows me to come to Jeff and say, maybe we disagree on politics.

I don't think we do, but maybe we disagree on politics, and maybe you represent these views, and I represent these views, and otherwise that might define us, and so it would have to divide us because you're not my people. But now I can come to him and I can say, you're in Christ, I'm in Christ, you're my people.

Now let's talk about our differences politically. Right? And so we as the church have this opportunity to model what this could look like in the larger world and to be a place.

Wouldn't it be amazing if down the road people in the general public, maybe they have all the connotations that they have now about the church, but they say, but you know, I'll say this. I'll say this. It's amazing to go in a community and see people who are willing to have civil discourse because that doesn't happen anywhere anymore.

It's amazing to see how those people deal with their disagreements over these major issues. Man, that thing tore my family apart, but they seem to be able to disagree honestly, and yet it doesn't tear them apart.

[ 29 : 53 ] Right? Somehow they're able to talk openly about their differences, and yet they do it while loving and respecting one another. Wouldn't it be amazing to hear people describe the church community, wow, look how open they are to alternative viewpoints.

I mean, I know that they disagree, but they were so open and curious to understand where I was coming from. I haven't experienced that in years. Or, wow, those people are actually willing to admit when they're wrong.

Those people are willing to own when they might need to change their mind on something. They don't see that as an existential threat to their existence, to their being, because they're rooted in something deeper.

They're rooted in Christ. First, social renewal. And then the final circle, the final circle, as we go all the way out, cultural or cosmic renewal.

You know, the fourth way I think we join in Christ's work is through the work of cultural renewal. A number of years ago, there was a sociologist named James Davidson Hunter who wrote a book called To Change the World.

[ 30 : 58 ] And I would, you know, I'd recommend you read it at some point. I think it's a really helpful book. His analysis is really helpful. He says that basically Christians have historically gone about trying to renew the culture in three ways.

Three ways that Christians have kind of false starts, that Christians have tried to renew the culture in these three ways. First is through evangelism. The idea of if we can just convert enough people, if we can statistically convert enough people, their culture will change.

And he says, you know, that just hasn't worked historically. We've had lots of revivals come through where lots of people got converted. The culture didn't really change. Other Christians have sought to do this through political action.



If we get enough Christians into office and get enough Christian-tinged legislation through, then we can begin to shift the culture. But that really hasn't worked either.

It can do some good. It can do some good, certainly. But it hasn't really brought about that culture shift because all we're dealing with is morality. We can't change hearts. And then thirdly, he says, some have gone the road of social reform.

[ 32 : 07 ] We just need to focus on doing justice and creating the kind of society that Christians would want. We need to create a society where there's equitable outcomes for everyone. And again, all of these approaches can be justified by different passages of Scripture.

And they all have merit. They all have value. But Hunter essentially shows why all of them fall short. They all fall short in one way or another. And so you ask, well, what does work?

And what does work sounds to me at the same time pretty simple and pretty massive. He says, here's what works if you look at history.

Groups of people like us living in cities with a high degree of intentionality. People who share a vision of what the world should be like and people who are working together in overlapping networks to try to pursue that vision.

He says, that's what works. And he gives examples of this throughout history. And you know, it may sound like a tall order to talk to a group like this and to say, let's renew the culture of D.C.

[ 33 : 19 ] That may be way too tall. That may be way above our pay grade. But I've seen how a group of Christians can change the culture of a workplace. I've seen how a group of Christians can change the culture of a local school.

I've seen how a group of Christians can change the culture of a neighborhood block. I remember years ago, a group of Christians from our church, block we were living on, just started a block party once a year.

And one of the coolest things that came out of that block party that these Christians did just as a way of loving the neighborhood was that people who had lived next door to each other and down the road from each other for years who had never interacted started becoming friends.

And all of a sudden, a community that was atomized started to become interconnected. And it was a culture shift. These kinds of things happen all the time. And so, the point that we're trying to make is this.

You, through your vocation, through the neighborhood where you live and work, you represent actually the primary mission of Church of the Advent. Whether you're working in medicine or business or government or raising kids or involved in education or media, the social sector, tech, retail, hospitality, whatever kind of work you do, wherever you live, whatever your vocation may be, you're the tip of the spear when it comes to the mission of this church.

[ 34 : 41 ] When people ask me, what are some of your ministry programs? I mean, we do have programs, and they absolutely have a place. They're absolutely vital to have programs. But our main ministry is our people.

It's our people. Many churches mistakenly think that the job of the church is to take people from all of these sectors, social sector, tech, retail, hospitality, medicine, and to pull them into the church and to pull them into the programs and to pull them into the initiatives.

But I think that's the opposite of what we should be doing. Listen to what Bob Briner writes. He says, Do you honestly believe that our big churches and highly visible Christian leaders have brought about a movement that is taken seriously in this country?

We feel we're making a difference because we're so important to ourselves. We've created a phenomenal subculture with our own media, entertainment, educational system, and political hierarchy so that we have the sense that we're doing a lot.

But what we've really done is to create a ghetto that is easily dismissed by the rest of society. I want to propose that our calling isn't just to pull everybody into our programs here within the walls of Church of the Advent.

[ 35 : 51 ] It's to live by a rhythm of gathering and scattering. Gathering and scattering. We gather to worship, to equip, to encourage, to patch up, to stitch up, to care, and then we scatter and we send you out into the world, into all of your various vocations, to extend the rule and reign of Christ into every sphere of life.

And then we gather together, and we patch you up, and we feed you, and we worship, and then we scatter back out to extend the rule and reign of Christ into every sphere of life.

And this is the rhythm of the church. Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. You know, that's why the beginning of our service starts with a welcome and an acclamation.

We're here at God's request. Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it's why it ends with a dismissal. Okay, we've gathered, and now it's time to scatter. Go, therefore, into the world rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Right? So, in all of these ways, our mission is rooted in Jesus' mission. In all of these ways, our mission emanates out of Jesus' mission.

[ 37 : 03 ] By the way, this is why, this is the last thing I'll say. I know I'm a bit lean on time here. This is why the home campaign matters so much. This is why we've been focusing so much time and energy on trying to raise money to secure a permanent home for Advent in Washington, D.C.

It's because we see that building not just as a place where we worship on Sundays, not just as a place where we pull everybody in out of the spheres where they're already doing God's work.

We see it primarily as a missionary outpost. A missionary outpost. It's a place of spiritual renewal where we can do the work of worship and evangelism. It's a place of personal renewal where we can have discipleship, counseling, spiritual direction, addiction recovery.

It's a place of social renewal where we can do the work of justice and mercy, racial reconciliation, civil discourse through events like Common Cup where we debate polarizing issues on purpose and then take communion.

And then a place of cultural renewal where we can equip people to serve as missionaries in their neighborhoods and in their vocations. And all of this, friends, is going to continue until the day when Jesus comes.

[ 38 : 16 ] And our city at that day will no longer be known as the center of human power and influence. It'll be known as a place where Jesus is king. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your mission.

And we thank you that you're doing it now in our lives and in the world around us. And I pray that whatever humility we need to participate in this mission would come from the knowledge of what you've done for us.

And I pray that the boldness that we need would come from our hearts which testify that you love us, that you delight in us, and that you're with us.

As you say to your disciples at the end of Matthew, Behold, I'm with you to the end of the age. And we know we're not called to do this alone, that we do it in step with you, Jesus. We thank you.

We praise you. We lift your name up and pray that one day all tongues and tribes will do the same. And it's in your name that we pray. Amen.