



Saltbush – Christology and Ethos



- Growing Healthy Congregations (Christian community)
 - Developing Vital Leaders
 - Transformative Community Engagement

“Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people’s attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.”¹

How do we perceive Christ reaching out to command our attention and awaken our faith in the society and century in which we find ourselves?

What is the “strange” way of a renewing Christ for today?

Saltbush is about responding to the “trend”¹ and urging of the Spirit towards change to creatively re-shape our missional practice with diverse, existing and new, Uniting Christian communities. Saltbush can be for our church an “awakening” to the “renewing” of Christ amongst and through us as we once more discover community as the early church in scattered Christian communities of faith and mission. Through Saltbush and the reshaping of ministry, if we are willing to embrace suffering, risk and the “strange” way of Christ, we reaffirm the place of missional Christian communities and the way of Christ to others through them. Saltbush seeks a way of embracing Christ’s church for the future rather than clinging to our own traditions and the church of the past.

Context

In many ways the institution of the Church is still functioning as if the place of the church in society, the size of church membership and the role of Ministry is as it was in the 1900’s. As we know all elements of both church and social life have changed and in the coming years we will have to find new ways of undertaking the roles of Presbytery and new ways of being Christian community (Congregations). The Saltbush understanding of this is that these new ways will not be found simply through re-structure and is not dependant on size or location, but has to have a solid foundation on the Way of Christ and the place of genuine Christian community.

The Church does not have the trust, voice in society and politics, nor the basic interest that it once held. Yet the church is still clinging to a structure that reflects only a small part of its 2000-year history; a structure from a time and world that no longer exists. In brief our church is now made up primarily of smaller congregations who do not have a Minister, never will have and who live in isolated, secular communities.

“If you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world!”¹

It is not true however that there is no longer a place for Christian communities who are able to discover renewed life as the Way of Christ amongst the lonely, needy, and broken hearted and be vital within their

¹ McLaren, B.

The church on the other side: Exploring the radical future of the local congregation.
Zondervan 2006. P. 15

own communities.² Again, it is not true that a Christian community has to be wealthy or large to be in mission and that small and remote does not belong to the wider body, the Church, and do not have a role to play. The future of the church will be diverse, but primarily found in smaller, not larger, or mega, gatherings.

The future of the church, both rural and urban, will be found in those Christian communities who simply gather in diverse ways and affirm:

- the Gospel is about **relationship and community** lived out within the wider community and world.
- the place of **Hospitality** as the foundation of God's longing for humanity and as a gracious act of welcoming.
- the need to be **intentional** about every aspect of gathering so that we discover an expression of being outward looking.
- the place of the **Word as the living opportunity** for communing both with God and others.
- the significance and place of being in **mission** as an expression of the way of Christ.

Theology and Christology

The fundamental theology of both the Jewish and Christian traditions is bound to the belief in both history and faith of the relational God. The Pentateuch, Psalms, Prophets and Gospels all revolve around the revealing and journeying with the relational God. This is also the foundation of our understanding of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Saltbush, as a movement of change and grounded mission, has over years reflected on the Mission of the Seventy from Luke 10. Theology should be foundational to our practice, and for Saltbush the Mission of the Seventy is an insightful image of both the relational God and the nature of mission. To shape our ministry we reflect on the following:

- This passage sits immediately following a few people who request to follow Jesus, but have reasons for why they are unable. In Luke 10, Christ sends those who are the willing - both to follow, but also to enter into the uncertain.
- The journey is undertaken with simplicity and a light load – without binding structure and debilitating expectation.
- The journey is into the uncertain and into the regions and homes where there will be both welcome and rejection. The mission unfolds where there is welcome and hospitality.
- There is time to sit in the places of welcome – to be there around the table with others.
- The mission is encompassed by discipleship, the greeting of peace and the announcement of the nearness of the Kingdom of God.
- On return there is amazement at what has taken place and it is all bound in the missional relationship of transformation in people's lives.

Luke 10...

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.² He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you;⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say,¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'

² For a reflection on the chronic loneliness within Australian society:

<https://psychweek.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Psychology-Week-2018-Australian-Loneliness-Report.pdf>

Theology and Christology as practice within Saltbush

From this we draw into our ministry what the Saltbush team call the “Missional Relationship”. This is the way God draws near and is marked by discipleship – hospitality – sitting with the others – announcing the nearness of the Kingdom of God.

It is only through this “Missional Relationship” that we participate in the revealing of God and the announcement of the nearness of God to others and to our world. It is through this missional relationship that Christian community is formed and lives drawn to experience Christ. This Mission of the Seventy is also the first example of followers shaping the future church and for our church within the context of our Australian community within the 21st C, the future lies in smaller, diverse Christian communities shaped by this missional relationship.

In every aspect of the practice of Saltbush as a ministry we seek to nurture this missional relationship as a means of discipleship and transformation of individuals, groups, congregations, Presbyteries, towards the church of the future.

The work of Saltbush is to encourage and connect Uniting Christian community, irrespective of size or location and to value the transforming way of God through the missional relationship. This is bound in valuing what is, including respecting the chaos, and the foundational Jewish/Christian belief that through chaos life is created.

“The word change normally refers to new beginnings. But transformation... more often happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart. The pain of something old falling apart – chaos – invites the soul to listen at a deeper level. It invites, and sometimes forces, the soul to go to a new place because the old places is falling apart. Most of us would never go to new places in any other way”.³

The shape of Saltbush for the future

One of the great temptations for the Church has, and is, to be our own saviours. We seek to save our own lives and in doing are faced with loosing life itself. Moltmann writes: “The Church only follows the promise of Christ and the trend of the Spirit when it accepts its own cross”. ⁴ There will only be life where we are able to give it up. It is easy to think that the words of Jesus were about us as individuals, but they are also about us as disciples. “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it”.⁵

Part of the ethos of Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community has to be centred around those people, congregations, and Presbyteries who are willing to give up, lose, let go of, in order to find life. As reflected in the Mission of the Seventy; ministry centred around both the hospitable house and the unknown future.

The place of Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community is to connect and encourage, irrespective of size or location:

- a) Existing smaller Uniting Christian communities who are willing and able to pare back as far as possible their traditions, habits, comforts and ways to discover the Way of Christ lived out in the community in which they find themselves.
- b) New intentional gatherings, who previously did not see themselves as ‘church’, and who through hospitality, Christian community, faith reflection and compassion, live out the way of Christ within the community in which they find themselves.

³ Rohr, R. The Wisdom Pattern. P. 84.

⁴ Jurgen Moltmann
The Church in the Power of the Spirit
p. 26.

⁵ Matthew 16: 25

Of course these Christian communities will be, live, express themselves, gather in totally different ways to the traditions of the present.

What does a Saltbush – Scattered Community look like?

Genuine gathering and mission is only found in the fire and passion of the people which is why so many imposed “models” and “projects” never come to life or have endurance.

The ministry of Saltbush is to affirm that Uniting Christian communities will be shaped by their own gifts, graces, contexts and passions. Each will express themselves differently, but will be connected to other gatherings and to the Saltbush Ministry Team. Each Saltbush Scattered Community will be valued as part of the body of the wider Uniting Church, exploring life and faith together.

A Uniting Saltbush Scattered Community should over time reflect the following attributes and work on shaping and expressing these through their gathering and mission relationship with others.

•Christ centred communities...

Uniting Christian communities who are able to reshape how they gather and simply place Christian discipleship as the centre of faith community.

•Mission as relationship...

Christian communities who seek to be in relationship, inspired through their faith, within their “local” community.

•Unity in diversity...

“The unity of the gathered congregation is visible and experienced in the fellowship of people who are in themselves different”. Freedom to rediscover, reshape, renew.

•One in Christ with other scattered communities

Uniting Christian communities who find encouragement, belonging and meaning as part of the wider body; the church.

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