



# The Trinity Pulpit



## **Fear Not** **Isaiah 43:1-14** Dr. Jeff Roberts January 10, 2010

The old *Star Trek* television show began with a challenge that we all can remember: to “boldly go where no one had gone before.” Most of us would like to face the future in a similar way. We would like to say that we are boldly going into the second decade of this millennium. To be bold is to move forward without fear and with determination. To go boldly to a place that is unknown means fear gives way to anticipation and anxiety is overcome by confidence. We all would like to go boldly into the future.

In Isaiah 43, God is instructing his people about going boldly into the future? The Israelite people have been living under the judgment of their sins. This passage of Isaiah is written during God’s people’s exile in Babylon, so the passage is a promise about the future. It is a promise about God’s faithfulness in a difficult time. God’s promise is essentially to remind the people of God that they belong to him and that he is not through with them. He reminds them that although they are in exile, this is not how their history will end. Instead, there will be deliverance and restoration.

Isaiah uses two images which speak of God’s deliverance and presence. First, when the people pass through the water God will be with them. The passing through the waters connects their past with their future. The people of Israel had been delivered before by passing through the waters. As God delivered his people through his servant Moses from the slavery of Egypt, they passed through the waters of the Red Sea; God used the same waters to bring their enemy to destruction. The pass through the water was a reminder of deliverance; it was a reminder of promise. The people of God crossed the Jordan River on dry ground as they went into the land of promise after wandering in the desert for a generation. So, when Isaiah uses this term he is connecting the people of Israel’s past with their future. Just like God has been faithful in deliverance and keeping his promise in the past, so God will be faithful to you.

The second image that Isaiah uses is to pass through the fire you will not be burned. The flames will not set you ablaze. Most scholars suggest that this represents times of trials and although there will be trials the message is that the trials will not destroy you. In the moments when you think this challenge or this trial is too much, God’s promise is that you will survive.

Isaiah’s promise to the people in exile is that they have a future that is tied to the faithfulness of their past with God. They will be delivered and they will survive. They can go into an unknown and uncertain future boldly because they belong to God. In fact, God says through Isaiah “You are precious and honored in my sight because I love you.”

Today, I want for us to focus on God’s promise: “be not afraid for I am with you.” As we go into the future together with God, can we go boldly and without fear because God is with us?

One scholar has suggested that the purpose of a leader is to define reality. To help the whole understand the moment and time in which they live. To do this we must look at our past, present and future. Remember, God says “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.” God ties our past to our future.

The first journey we need to take today as we consider the state of our church is to journey into the past. We must connect our past with our future. I have included in your outline today some statistical information – our membership, Sunday School attendance and undesignated gifts for every year since 1998. Now, it needs to be noted that there were times in the 1990s that our attendance was greater than what we find in the later 1990s. That is to say, Trinity has known times of growth, plateau and re-growth that every church experiences from time to time. Every church goes through moments of growth, plateau, and some experience decline; yet, even those in de-

cline numerically can find spiritual and ministerial growth. The “numbers” are good for us to see because they do reveal how God has added to our number in the past years. They do not necessarily indicate church health only church size. What we can take away from these numbers is that God has given us more resources, more people to care for, and the ability to make a difference in our city and world.

Where I would like to focus in the area of our past is to look at the three transitions we have made at Trinity in the past decade. When I arrived as your pastor in 2000, we quickly began to speak of three transitions. These transitions were a result of observation by our staff, church council and others and also a result of the good work that was done by our transition team during our interim period. We articulated these transitions in this way.

Suburban to Midtown Church  
3 Days-a-Week Campus to 7 Days-a-Week Campus  
Missions Giving to Missional (Giving and Going)

As we come to the close of the first decade of this century I believe that we have made these transitions. We have transitioned from a Suburban church to a Midtown Church. When we first used these terms, we were speaking purely geographically of our location in Raleigh. There was not a place called “Midtown” when we used the word in early 2001. When we used this term we were speaking of the challenge of having families drive 15 to 20 minutes to come to church. Our immediate community was not growing and prospect for population change was slim. Our challenge was to continue to have families drive past other churches to come to Trinity from points farther north. What kind of schedule would we need to offer? What would make Trinity unique for people to choose to make this drive each and every week, sometimes many times a week? As we continued to look at these issues – and we still do – something amazing happened around us. A true residential, commercial and retail destination was created. The result is the term “Midtown” has certain connotations and particular geographical lines. Trinity is the heart of this new Midtown. We have taken several steps to connect our church with the image of this new area of development. We will continue to find ways that when people think of Midtown they think of Trinity Baptist Church.

A second transition we made was to move to a 7 days-a-week campus. We had glimpses of this with our Week-day Preschool which continues to be one of our best ways to connect to our community at large. In addition to this ministry we added the ROC and its daily connection to the community. We began Bible Studies on site and off site on days other than Wednesday and Sunday.

TNT, Women’s Studies, Mission Opportunities, Upward Basketball, and the use of this facility by others in the community have created a busy and vibrant campus where we are connecting with community members on a daily basis. Trinity has a great name in our community as being a church that is open, helpful, warm and friendly.

The third transition is mission giving to missional or giving and going. When I arrived as your pastor, one of the goals I heard from the church was to be more hands on in missions. I must give Rev. Melton credit for making this happen. His love for missions and passion for the least of these has created a missions organization that is a model for other churches. I do not have time to list all of the mission activities that this church is involved in, but it is important for us to understand that weekly there is something happening here, or there are Trinity members in this community and sometimes around this world at work sharing the gospel of Christ by word and deed. Trinity has become a missional church.

This is our past. This is the process that God has brought us through. Now we must connect our past with our present and future. God has brought us through these transitions to create us into the congregation that is prepared for the future.

Lyle Schaller, the church health and growth consultant, says that when he consults with a church the first question he asks is what year the church is living in. It is important for the church to be aware of the present. What are the present situation, setting and context for the church, and is the church living in that context? What is our present situation and context? To help us understand our present situation, let’s watch the video that was prepared by our North Hills Visioning Team.

We are reminded in the work of our visioning team that we are living in a time of change and opportunity. What is wonderful about our findings is that we reflect in many ways the population change in North Hills. From our average age to the ministry and programs we currently offer, we are making connections to our community and it would seem, that it would be only natural for us to grow and reach new people. Yet, we know for this to occur we must continually be looking to God’s leadership and to be ready to take the next steps of faith.

Although God’s word ties our past and present to the future, God’s future for us will not just occur because of our past and present. We must learn to move into the future boldly and with faith that God will be with us as we pass through any challenges.

This brings me finally to where we are going. I cannot say in particular terms this is or that is going to happen, but I do have three words I want us to consider as we consider our future at Trinity.

The first word is *accountability*. To whom much is given much is required. We must learn to be not only accountable to God but to one another. What do I mean by accountability? First, I mean that we must be accountable to God in regards to our own commitment and service. If Trinity is going to go into the future, then each and every one of us must find the place we are unique in the body of Christ we call Trinity Baptist Church. As our church has grown, it has become easy for us to say "Well, we are a large church now and that means someone else will do this job or take this responsibility." It is easy for us to say "I did my time in this area now someone else can do it." The church is only as healthy as we are all willing to offer our self in service.

To help us do this in February we are going to ask that all of our members take a gift assessment survey to help our Nominating Committee and Committee on Committees as they seek individuals to serve in various ministries in our church. The purpose of this is to place us all in the place where our passion and spiritual gifts intersect. When we serve out of our giftedness, there is not only joy for us but the body of Christ becomes healthy and vibrant.

We need not only to be accountable to God with our gifts but with our resources. We are passing through a hard time economically. Many have lost work in our church and many are still worried. Yet, you have been so faithful in 2009. We will finish the year in the black because of your giving and because of good stewardship by our staff, Finance Committee and members. This is an amazing accomplishment in such a time. As we move forward, we all need to reflect on our priorities in regards to giving. The Bible instructs us to tithe; that is, to give to God a tenth of our income as an act of worship and faith. If you are not tithing and giving, then you are missing God's blessing and you are holding the church back from achieving all that God has for us.

We must be accountable to each other. I hear from many members "I do not know them," or people will say "I just don't know everyone at church like I used to." First, I would say, "We should thank God we don't recognize everyone at church, because that is an indication that we are reaching new people for the kingdom of God." The second comment I would make is that we are accountable for knowing each other. We have to begin to make the effort to ask people their

names. I want to declare 2010 the no-embarrassment year. This is the year that we all agree that we will not be embarrassed to ask the person who sits next to us every week their name. We will not make anyone feel embarrassed if someone asks our name when we think they should already know it. It really does not matter. We are going to practice grace. I want to encourage you to ask and tell your name; more than that, to become accountable to one another in regards to encouragement and care. One area you will notice accountability is in our deacon ministry. First, we took the first step in a two-year process to get to 60 deacons. This year, we elected 22 new deacons to help us in this transition. We are not only going to be assigning our deacons to Sunday School classes for care this year, but we will also be assigning them particular people in those classes, as well as members who do not attend Sunday School. Every church member will be assigned a particular deacon who will seek to be accountable to you and to help you be accountable to the church. We become accountable to God and each other when we serve, give and encourage.

The second word is *intentional*. To be intentional means not to always be responding to the challenges of the future but to be proactive toward the future. Again, we are to go boldly not with anxiety but with confidence. One way that we are being intentional and proactive for our future is in regard to our campus. As you know, we have a committee that has been working on looking at the feasibility of expansion of our Narthex and our Sanctuary. We are all well aware that this is a hard time economically to be thinking about building and expanding, but this process began before the recession and it will probably end after the recession; the result will be that we were intentional in preparing for our future.

Following are just a few facts about this process so we are all on the same page. This process began by our Trustees two years ago as they began to look at the need for more room in the Narthex. The need had become evident for more room not only for safety but to create places for information, registration, and the welcoming of guests. The Trustees asked permission from the church to do a feasibility study with an architectural firm. This study was to help us determine if structurally and financially we thought the church could pursue such a project. In this process, the Trustees understood that it would be shortsighted not to look at expanding the Sanctuary if possible as a part of this project. The thinking is clear that if you expand the Narthex but do not expand the Sanctuary, then to come back and expand the Sanctuary would be more costly in the future. So, the Trustees looked at several possible ways to expand both or just the Narthex. The conclusion of the Trustees was that this was a feasible project in regards to financial and structural guides. The Trustees then asked the church

for permission to form a committee to take the next steps. This committee was formed and approved by the church. The next step was to develop a plan for steps needed to be taken in the process. Finally, the church approved up to \$60,000 to be spent to hire an architectural firm to begin the process of programming and developing a plan the church could approve or reject. That is where we are at this moment. Our architectural firm will begin meeting with focus groups in the church in the next few weeks to listen and dream with us about the possibilities of the future. The initial plans will be developed and the church will continually have the opportunity to give input into the initial planning and of course the final planning. Let me make it clear that we have not voted to build anything at this point. We have a long process ahead of us before one spade of dirt is turned. We are just beginning, but it is a process that is intentional concerning our future.

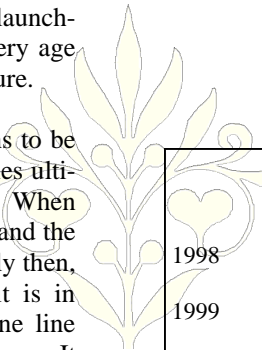
This is just one of the ways we are being intentional about our future. We also are in the process of launching Sunday School classes and ministries to every age group as a way of being intentional about the future.

The last word is *incarnational*. The word means to be the very presence of Christ. I think our future lies ultimately not in programs or facilities but presence. When the church discovers they are the body of Christ and the very presence of God in this world; then, and only then, will the kingdom of God come on earth as it is in heaven. To be incarnational is to walk the fine line between being in this culture and not of this culture. It is to immerse ourselves in this community and yet remember that we have been called out to be different. It is a hard line to walk but it is the example of Jesus. Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He lived in a particular time and place; yet, he was universal and eternal. That is our challenge as well.

Church consultant Bob Dale says three things are needed to be incarnational. First there is contextual intelligence. Where are we located? We are located in North Hills in North Raleigh in Raleigh, North Carolina. Gone are the days of franchised churches and gone are the days of trying to take from one church a program, ministry, or model and transplant it in another setting. We must be the church here in this place and in this context. We also understand timing. We must understand the rhythms and timing of the lives of those around us. We must respond at the right time to the needs and searching of those around us. That will take discernment, patience, and most of all, the guidance of

the Holy Spirit. We need structures that fit our setting. As one writer puts it “Jesus did not give us a model but Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit.” We must learn to walk with Jesus each day in this setting with this community and their strengths and weaknesses. With their misplaced priorities and yet best desires, with their self confidence and with their awareness of their fear of the future. We must be there as the very presence of Christ. Incarnational is the way to the future.

Let us go boldly without fear into the future. When we go into the future, God will be with us. The same God that has been faithful will be faithful this year. Let us go with God’s presence knowing that whatever challenge we face it will not destroy us – we will not only survive but thrive with Christ. Let us be accountable, intentional and most of all let us be incarnational – the very presence of Christ. ✨



**Statistical Information 1998-2009**

	Avg. S.S.	Resident Membership	Undesignated Gifts
1998	557	1754	1,066,099
1999	561	1739	1,122,662
2000	562	1776	1,095,409
2001	591	1797	1,133,304
2002	631	1900	1,274,028
2003	622	1920	1,406,964
2004	682	1975	1,552,862
2005	729	2052	1,586,478
2006	786	2132	1,696,181
2007	822	2226	2,316,818
2008	830	2276	2,136,525
2009	901	2335	2,301,223

