

MISSIONAL INITIATIVES

Monthly Newsletter

DECEMBER 2023

Article, Story, and Resource contributed by Cam Roxburgh, VP of Missional Initiatives

The Practice of Dwelling

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son,
who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.
John 1:14*

John 1:14 is a well-known and well-used verse, especially at this time of the year. God became flesh. Incarnate. Jesus moved into the neighbourhood. He was and is present.

Although not all are fans of saying that we too need to live incarnationally for fear it diminishes the reality that God became a human being, at least we are learning what it means to “dwell” in our neighbourhoods. This practice has become far more popular and evident over the past number of years, and we should celebrate that reality. If you have not been engaging in this practice, here’s to 2024 and the renewed sense that Christ has sent us into the places we live and work to be present with the people of that place.

What does it mean to dwell? It means to be present and to begin to attend to what God is already doing there.

Here are some examples.

1. Dwelling in the Word – Please do not stop exegeting the text. It is crucial that we pay attention to the issues that the text presents and do our best to understand the meaning. But that is not enough. We need to hear God’s voice as He speaks to us through His word. One way to do this is to “dwell” in the text, paying attention to where God “stops us” as we are reading. What is He saying to us? It is important to note that He does not say to us something contrary to what the text means, nor does He give us the words and then leave

us to figure out the meaning on our own. We listen, particularly in community, for the voice of the Spirit (John 14:26).

2. Dwelling in Our Neighbourhoods – God did not create all things and then stand back and watch it work. He is present and active in the neighbourhoods where He has sent us. It is our responsibility to “dwell” in our neighbourhoods and discern His presence. For too long we have lived as if God is found only in our church buildings, and after we meet there with Him we need to go and develop programs and strategies to “reach our neighbours.” The Jews made this mistake in Jeremiah 28 and 29. Instead they were told, as are we, to build houses and settle down. Seek the peace and prosperity of the place where they live. This means that we not only should be prayer-walking more than we do, but that we must learn to develop rhythms and habits of shopping locally and finding third spaces in which to be with our neighbours. We have spent so much time “doing for” that we have neglected “being with.” There is much repenting needed in order to cure us of our lust for power and control.
3. Dwelling with One Another – It is also important for us to recapture the conviction that we bear witness to Christ in community and not just on our own. For many, COVID has brought questions around the validity of church. While it is good for us to seek God’s plan afresh for how we gather, if we drift into the belief that we can “do Christianity” on our own, we have come to believe a lie. We will find ourselves not only drifting away from being with one another, but also not living into the reality of what it means to be in Christ (and His people). The practice of dwelling with one another is of crucial importance in bearing witness to the reality of who God is – Trinitarian in nature.

I pray that during this Advent season, when we sing and tell the story of life in, for, and with a Messiah who came to dwell with us, that we will recapture the practice of dwelling in, for, and with our neighbourhoods, so that we may participate in what God is doing there.

STORY

I have just finished another year of teaching the cohort called Life in the Neighbourhood. We met for nine months online and began to grapple with the theology of place and being sent to the people there. We learned and engaged in the practices that helped us to “dwell” there.


One of my friends who was in the cohort told us several weeks ago of walking in his new neighbourhood (he recently moved) and bumping into a woman and her child in a stroller. They stopped and talked for awhile as he got the run-down on what made the neighbourhood tick. They agreed to meet again as they were able.

Less than two weeks later, he was invited to come to the local school to give an Advent devotional. As he met with the principal, she remarked that she had heard good things about him from someone at the school. He asked who that might possibly be as he had only been in the neighbourhood a few months. It was the woman he had met while on a walk only two weeks prior. It turns out that she was the PTA president and knew everyone in the school (and neighbourhood).

Now, Luke 10:5–6, the passage that we had dwelt in all year together, sunk in. Here was a person of peace, and God had led him to that person. He now had also discovered that when God sends us to places He is about to go, that we go and find out if God has already become present to the people of that place.

RESOURCES

Webinar



WEBINAR
Dwelling: The Practice of Being With

We dwell in the text and in our neighbourhoods. We dwell with the people of that place, and dwell there "for" the sake of the world. Come discover the importance, value and practice of dwelling, led by The Commons Network.

18
JAN

12PM (PT) | 8PM (GMT)
This event is free. Limited spots!

Register Here
thecommonsnetwork.com



The Commons Network is a group given to helping one another dwell in our neighbourhoods, discern where God is at work, and then explore ways in which we can join Him. Come and join a webinar led by the TCN team on January 18 around the theme of dwelling.

Read

Check out also Barry Jones book called *Dwell: Life with God for the World*.

