

## A Future that's Bigger Than the Past, Pt. 3: "Becoming a Blessing"

*Theme: God empowers the Church not merely to offer blessings, but to be a blessing in the world*

### I. Becoming a Blessing

- A. The story of Michael Douglas and David Letterman (Sept. 1, 2010)
  - 1. The church has sacred gifts to share with the world
  - 2. The world has sacred gifts to share with the church
- B. "The educated speak of a disenchanted (a boring) world," Saul Bellow (*Humboldt's gift*). "But it is not the world, it is my own head that is disenchanted. The world *cannot be* disenchanted."

### II. Proposals for the Renewal of Faith and Culture

- A. Makoto Fujimura: the estuary
  - 1. Estuaries mix fresh and salt water
  - 2. Purpose is not so much *protection* as *preparation* (the oyster cleanses and purifies)
- B. Rowan Williams: the meaning of beauty
  - 1. Aquinas: beauty is "that which pleases when seen"
  - 2. True art "well and honestly made will exhibit that overflow of presence that generates joy"
- C. The Church as a "public parable"
  - 1. The Church, itself, *is* a work of art; "We are God's work of art," (Eph. 2:10, paraphrased)
  - 2. Church is both a place and a people
    - a) A place where art can be displayed/performed
    - b) But also a people whose lives have been changed by encounters with an artistic God
- D. Not Church *vs.* World, but Church *and* World
  - 1. The Church does not "have" a culture, the Church *is* a culture
  - 2. Church/world dichotomy runs right through the human heart

### III. The Church and World Blessing One Another

- A. Recall the openness of the eschatological (final) vision of the new city in Revelation 21
- B. The Church is a foretaste of this open, "magnetic" community that invites, blesses, and heals
- C. How does (and how can) First Baptist Church of Asheville do this?
  - 1. Worship — inviting, blessing, healing
  - 2. Musical arts
  - 3. Creating the "infrastructure" for holy friendships
    - a) Lifelong learning
    - b) Venue for creative arts
    - c) Welcoming the community

### IV. "Make it Beautiful"

- A. Wells's story of what he'd put on his tombstone: "If it can't be happy, make it beautiful."
- B. My "beautiful feet" story: Sitting beside my dying grandfather