

Ostrich Evangelism
by Mike Ruhl

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Jesus' ascension into heaven (Acts 1:1-11) includes a powerful reminder of the multi-faceted mission field which we are called to reach with the good news of the Gospel. There Jesus declared: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

His words remind us of the different contexts in the mission field. The *Jerusalem context* is local community mission, where your congregation is located. The *Judea context* is the regional mission field, perhaps your state or region of the country. The *Samaria context* is the cross-cultural mission field: generational, ethnic and worldview groups within your reach. And the *ends of the earth context* is the global mission field.

Since the mission field is multi-faceted, the church must not assume the "ostrich position" when it comes to understanding the world that Christ has commanded it to reach. We cannot "bury our heads in the sand," ignoring immigrant migrations, postmodern shifts in thinking, ethnic group values and other cultural trends.

This kind of knowledge and insight into contiguous culture can be frightening, somewhat overwhelming, and even disturbing to the existing, internal culture of a Christian congregation. Yet our call to witness demands that we become *culture watchers*. Missional congregations know the importance of exegesis. Certainly spending quality time exegeting Scripture is indispensable to the confession and life of a congregation. Likewise, quality time spent *exegeting the culture* is indispensable as well.

In fact, the Old Testament contains a splendid example of culture watching. The writer of 1 Chronicles describes how the tribes of Israel aligned with David in his battles against Saul. When he gets to the men of Issachar, he describes them as those who "understood the times and knew what Israel should do." (1 Chronicles 12:32)

How can the church use the Scriptures to address the world (multi-faceted mission field) if it does not know what is going on in the world? How can a congregation reach effectively into its immediate community if it does not know, understand or embrace (without compromising the Word) the culture of the community?

The mission of the church is empowered by a dove, the Holy Spirit, that lifts eyes to the mission field, not by an ostrich, with head buried in the sand. And the Spirit is called Counselor and Comforter. The Spirit brings both of these gifts to God's people as they engage in culture watching for the sake of mission. ■

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