

WHY CHRISTIAN HORIZONS?

Keynote Address at the 50th Annual General Meeting of Christian Horizons,
September 19, 2015 in Kitchener, Ontario
Presented by Jim Reese

Thank you, Janet, for inviting me to share on this significant anniversary of Christian Horizons. We so appreciate your excellent leadership of this vital ministry. Adrienne, Steven and I want to express our praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for what He has done throughout these past fifty years through Christian Horizons to bring hope and blessing to so many.

1965 was a good year. Canada began waving a new flag. The hills came alive with The Sound of Music. And Christian Horizons was born.

In the Bible we read that God instructed his people to mark every 50th year as a Jubilee. Jubilee means “trumpet blast” to announce the gracious presence of the Lord, to proclaim liberty, freedom and grace for all who suffer, and deliverance from want for the poor.

Of the 21 times in the Bible that the word Jubilee appears, the first is found in Leviticus 25:9, *“You shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land.”* The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, pointed each year to the coming of Jesus whose death on the cross would make atonement for all who will receive Him as Savior. And as a result of Christ’s finished work on the cross and his resurrection, it is most fitting that in this Jubilee year of Christian Horizons, we should praise, worship and adore our Savior who has blessed this ministry for 50 years. For Christian Horizons is really all about Jesus.

As we look back over the past 50 years, there is wisdom in taking time to pause and review why this ministry was brought into being. A simple question could be “WHY CHRISTIAN HORIZONS? What is our reason for existence? Or as we would say in French, what is our “raison d’etre?”

But it occurs to me that before we can rightly answer the question WHY CHRISTIAN HORIZONS?, we need to ask first of all a preliminary question, WHY CHRISTIAN? In other words, what is a Christian?, what does a Christian believe?, what is the Christian world view?

Every cognitive person has a world view, whether they realize it or not. I watched my one year old great-grand daughter Holly toddling through her family home last month in British Columbia, and it struck me that she has a world view which is developing, but presently includes a Mom and Dad and a sister, and food, especially blue berries.

We all have a perception, whether simple or complex, of the world around us and how we relate to that big picture. And as we grow, we try to figure out the basic questions of life, Where did I come from? Why am I here? and Where am I going? We are all seeking meaning and purpose in life.

Of all the basic world views, whether, Atheistic, Agnostic, Monotheistic, Polytheistic, Pantheistic, or Self-theistic, the foundation of Christian Horizons is the conviction that the Christian World View is the most credible. Every world view begins with faith. The Atheist cannot prove scientifically that there is no God, but believes there is no God and then builds his life upon that 'a priori' assumption. The Agnostic believes he doesn't know if there's a God or not, but builds his life philosophy on that empty foundation. The Monotheist (whether Jew, Christian or Muslim) believes there's one God and seeks to live life in relation to that God. The Polytheist (whether Greek or Roman, or Hindu or animist) believes there are many gods and seeks to appease them all. The Pantheist believes everything is God and worships everything. The Self-theist sees himself as a god who builds his life on the understanding expressed by William Ernest Henley in the last line of his poem *Invictus*:

'I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.'

But the Christian world view is established on two a priori truths: #1-God is, and #2-the Bible correctly teaches me who He is and how I am to relate to Him and live my life.

And so Dorothea Day wrote a counterpoint to Henley's *Invictus*:

Instead of "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul", she wrote, 'Christ is the Master of my fate! Christ is the Captain of my soul!'

What is the Christian World View?

- The eternal God, as revealed in the Bible, is the creator of the universe.
- He is all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present.
- He is holy, just, loving, merciful.
- He made mankind perfect, not as a robot, but with a will to love God from the heart.
- But mankind chose to rebel, resulting in sin and death.
- Yet God so loved every human being that He sent His Son Jesus to pay the price on the cross sufficient to forgive all human sin.
- Jesus rose from the dead, is seated as victor in heaven, and will return to earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- All who place their trust in Christ have forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and the ability provided by the Holy Spirit to bring God's healing grace into our broken world.

Last month, on our drive back home from B.C. to Ontario, we drove the Trans Canada Highway which passed by Craigelachie in British Columbia. We stopped to visit the place where the last spike was driven. Pierre Berton wrote the book called *THE LAST SPIKE*, about the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway during 1881-1885. One team built from the east and another from the west. And they met in Craigelachie where Donald A. Smith, Director of the Canadian Pacific Railway, drove the last spike that brought East and West together.

A plaque nearby reads, “THE LAST SPIKE. A nebulous dream was a reality: an iron ribbon crossed Canada from sea to sea. Often following the footsteps of early explorers, nearly 3000 miles of steel rail pushed across vast prairies, cleft lofty mountain passes, twisted through canyons, and bridged a thousand streams. Here on November 7, 1885, a plain iron spike welded East to West.”

“A plain iron spike welded East to West.” And as I thought more about that, it occurred to me that “A plain iron spike welded God to mankind.” I hold a 1st century Roman spike. As Jesus willingly stretched out his hands to be crucified, it was as though he grasped our heavenly Father’s hand in one and mine in the other and pulled us together saying “be reconciled.”

This painting by Salvador Dali in 1951, captures for me the meaning of that last spike, after two were nailed into Jesus’ hands and that final spike nailed into his two feet. Here is where “The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). That unique view as Dali saw it from above, where God was looking down on His Son, shows those shoulders bearing the sins of the world, my sins and your sins. That moves me greatly. But I think into the future, that those same shoulders of the resurrected Jesus, on His return to earth, will bear the government of this world and the universe upon His shoulders (Isa. 9:6).

On that day of Christ’s return, then will be fulfilled the prayer that He taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

This picture by Thomas Blackshear makes Christ’s death and resurrection so personal for me. Here we see a man holding a spike and a mallet. It’s obvious that he was the executioner. But we also see the resurrected Jesus, still with the spike wounds in his hands, surrounding his exhausted crucifier with arms of love. This picture reminds me that it was I who crucified Jesus. It was my sins that put Him there. But I can say what the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 2:20, that because I’ve received Jesus as my Savior by faith, “I am crucified with Christ.”

Next month Adrienne and I will be leading another tour to the Holy Land. I love teaching the Bible on location where the greatest story ever told historically happened. Here’s a picture of the empty tomb just outside the north wall of the city of Jerusalem, reminding us that Jesus was crucified and buried and raised again the third day. Each time we go there I invite my people to enter the tomb, see that it is empty, and when you come out, stand in the door and exclaim, “I have been raised with Christ.”

It’s been a joy through the years to take many of our family members on these tours. Steven has been there twice. Here is one of our granddaughters, Laura, stepping out of the tomb and saying, “I have been raised with Christ,” meaning I’ve receive Jesus as my Savior by faith and I’m living the new life He’s given me.

So, in answer to the question “Why Christian?” It’s because of the overwhelming evidence in nature, in science, in history and in Scripture that the Christian World View best fits the criteria of all the evidence. Every cell in my body screams that there is a designer. Consider the intricate design of the DNA molecule with 3 billion characters in digital code. That could never have happened by random chance.

And so I invite you now to consider the next question, “Why Christian Horizons?”

The mandate of Christian Horizons is found in Romans 15:1 “*We who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*”

And our chief example is Jesus as Romans 15:3 says, “*For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, ‘The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.’*”

Or, as Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message*: “*That’s exactly what Jesus did. He didn’t make it easy for himself by avoiding people’s troubles, but waded right in and helped out. ‘I took on the troubles of the troubled.’*”

So, Why Christian Horizons? Let me share several reasons:

Why Christian Horizons? #1. Because many Christian parents longed for such a ministry.

For 17 years from 1961 to 1978 I traveled across all 10 provinces of Canada, and worked with Christians from over 50 different denominations in trans-denominational outreach. Whenever I would give a testimony of how the Lord had blessed our home with the birth of Steven in 1963, people would come up to me after each meeting saying, “We too have been blessed as you have. And we’ve been raising our child in the Christian environment of our home and with the loving support of our church, but we’re getting older and we are very concerned that our child shall have the same warm and loving Christian environment when we are no longer able to provide it.” That is what kick-started my heart to realize that we needed to establish a distinctively evangelical Christian ministry to support these families.

Why Christian Horizons? #2. Because a new model of care was needed: home-centered rather than institution-centered.

I’m the oldest of three sons. When my youngest brother suffered a nasty fall in 1941 as a four-month-old baby, resulting in severe cognitive impairment, my parents considered the one alternative outside their home for John’s care. I remember them coming home from investigating the large institution in Coldwater, Michigan. And they said, “No, we cannot place John there.” And so, for the rest of his life John lived with my parents. I also remember the day Steven was born on March 5, 1963. After telling me the realities that we were facing, our doctor told me that he could begin the process of enrolling him at the hospital in Orillia which was later called the Huronia Regional Centre. But again, we said, “No.”

Why Christian Horizons? #3. Because we live in a pluralistic society where Canada

affirms the freedom to practice one’s beliefs according to one’s conscience. When Christian Horizons began, it was only people with a commitment to a Christian world view that sought out our services. But in more recent years we have been privileged to serve many who do not embrace all aspects of the Christian world view, but who have found genuine kindness and community here and a place to grow and thrive.

Why Christian Horizons? #4 Because everyone has the right to experience God’s love lived out in care-givers who are following the example of Jesus.

The Bible says in Matthew 9:35-37 “*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*” He further said in John 10:11, “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*” That’s the kind of loving care we desire to give in Christian Horizons as the hands and feet of Jesus.

Why Christian Horizons? #5 Because true fulfillment includes the nurturing of the total person: physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. Luke 2:52 says that as a boy growing up, “*Jesus increased in wisdom (intellectually) and stature (physically) and in favor with God (spiritually) and man (socially).*” Everyone should have the right to that same holistic development.

Why Christian Horizons? #6 Because there’s more to life than just our 70, 80 or 90+ years on earth. Each one of us has an eternal soul to be lived consciously somewhere. And this life is the dressing room for eternity. God has planned a glorious future for people who are trusting Him in spite of their present limitations. Isaiah announced it in chapter 35:5,6,8, “*Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy... The simple will not stray.*” It’s just our privilege to offer care to those we serve until perfection sets in.

Finally, Why Christian Horizons? #7. Because Christian Horizons is like a three-fold cord that is not quickly broken. (as the Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:12). The first strand represents all the precious people we serve. The second strand represents all those caring and proficient people who support those we serve. And wrapped around both those we serve and those who serve, is our loving God who supports us all and gives us strength to pursue successfully the goal of building communities of belonging, where people with exceptional needs are valued and respected and encouraged to develop and use their God-given gifts.

The horizon is that horizontal line where heaven touches earth. And Christian Horizons is a place where God’s love touches people.

Last month, on our long drive home from British Columbia, we drove near Thunder Bay and stopped along the Trans Canada Highway to visit the inspiring memorial to Terry Fox. We all remember him as the young man who, in spite of cancer that cost him his right leg, began a cross-Canada run to raise awareness and money for cancer research. He began by dipping his prosthetic leg into the Atlantic Ocean in 1980, with the goal of doing the same in the Pacific. He ran for 143 days and covered 5, 373 kilometers. I remember his passing through this very city of Kitchener. Terry was unable to finish his Marathon of Hope because on this location of the memorial the returning cancer caused him to cancel his dream, and on June 28, 1981 he died. But his dream didn’t die. And tomorrow the 35th annual Terry Fox Run will involve hundreds of thousands of runners across Canada.

Christian Horizons began a race 50 years ago. We’ve covered lots of ground that has taken us to many places in Canada and around the world. But until the King comes back, we have a calling to continue this race, to engage more and more precious people with the care that God will help us provide. And I invite you to keep looking forward to the ever increasing horizons of opportunity that our Lord is putting before us.

As I mentioned earlier, Christian Horizons is really all about Jesus and how He loves people. If there were no Jesus there would be no Christian Horizons. That’s why it’s called “Christian Horizons”. Jesus truly cares for us and He is our model of care-giving. Dr. James Allan Francis included these thoughts in a sermon he preached way back in 1926, which I’ve slightly adapted and with which I close:

Jesus is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. But he arose the third day and ascended to heaven, promising to return.

Twenty long centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever set sail; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life. Jesus!