

...FOR THOSE SEEKING THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE *Holy Spirit*

# Lutheran Renewal

Number 224 • September 2005

## *Whispering* into their Souls:

A SPIRITUALITY OF ENGAGEMENT FOR NOT-YET-CHRISTIANS

By Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch

Some years ago we came across the story of Monty Roberts, called *The Man Who Listens to Horses*. Though loosely the basis of the book and film, *The Horse Whisperer* (starring Robert Redford), Monty's story doesn't quite resemble the film's melodrama and romance. His is the simple story of a man's affinity with animals, in particular the wild mustangs of Montana's mountains. Monty grew up on a ranch with his family of horse traders. For generations the Roberts' had ridden out into the rugged mountains to round up the wild horses that they would then break and sell to other Montana ranchers. The magnificent untamed beasts that roamed the mountains were all sinew and muscle, all wild instinct and sheer physical power. Breaking them was no mean feat. Once Monty's grandfather, father, uncles or brothers had captured a mustang and confined it to a corral, they then had to break its magnificent spirit. This could mean weeks of work, as these most spirited of animals were often very difficult to tame. Monty says that some horses were so wild that one of their fetlocks (behind of the knee), had to be tied with rope around their necks. The wildest, most powerful animals could finally be broken only after much blood, sweat and suffering.

Even as a young boy, Monty Roberts suspected that there had to be a better way to befriend these

mustangs than to break their spirits so cruelly. Then, during his adolescence, while riding up in the Montana high country, he noticed that whenever a beast was separated from the herd and left

to wander alone in the mountains it often became sick, even to the point of near-death. This got him thinking. If these were such herd animals with a powerful, innate instinct for connection with other creatures, then maybe that instinct could be used for taming them. He began experimenting on a different way of "breaking" wild mustangs, and until his early adulthood he developed a whole new method. Now, he travels the world demonstrating his approach.

During a *60 Minutes* program, Monty Roberts taught the world his method of horse whispering. It involves his getting into the corral with the untamed mustang and staying as far from the animal as possible, without leaving the enclosure. He also refuses to allow any eye contact between him and the horse. By moving slowly, but surely, away from the horse and by keeping his head averted from the animal's gaze, Monty slowly draws the horse to himself. Even though the beast is pounding the earth with his hoof and snorting and circling the corral with great speed, Monty keeps steadily moving away from the horse. He won't look at it. He won't approach it. As astounding as it sounds, within an hour, Monty can have a wild mustang saddled and carrying a rider quite happily. When asked his secret, he says, "These animals need

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(Independent of North Heights Lutheran Church)

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If people find friendship with *Jesus* through our

friendship with them,

that is the work of the *Holy Spirit*.

contact with others so much, they would rather befriend their enemy than be left alone.” When he discovered this method of “whispering” into the horse’s deepest longing, he told his weather-beaten father and uncles and brothers that there was no longer any need to crush the mustang’s spirit. He demonstrated his new method, but to this day, in spite of the evidence that it works, Montana ranchmen still use the traditional approach.

Monty’s story reminds us of the church. Even though he has discovered an effective way of *listening to horses*, (his own term), the old Montana horsemen won’t budge. They’ve been breaking horses their own way for generations. Why should they change now?

The church might say, we’ve been “breaking” sinners like them for generations. Leave them to us. But the old method of crushing the spirits of seekers who don’t fit the conventional, stereotypical church testimony won’t be effective any longer. Many people in our day are avoiding the church like the plague. It’s time for us to develop a *spirituality of engagement* with not-yet-Christians. That will involve true listening and genuine presence.

The traditional method of reaching not-yet-Christians often has been to bludgeon them into recognition of how broken they are. To crush their spirit. To tear them down and bring them to their knees. It’s like Gene Greitenbach’s analogy about a make-believe couple named Charley and Sara.

Charley and Sara hang out together in the early stages of their relationship, but Charley sees too many of Sara’s faults to be romantically interested in her. Then one day it dawns on him:

*The way to help Sara is to date her. If we were to go out, my strengths would rub off on her and she would be far better off for it. It will require sacrifice on my part, but it’s the least I can do. Charley marches up to Sara’s door with a book entitled, “100 Things Sara Needs to Change in Order to Become a Real Person.” He rings the doorbell. When she answers, he shoves the book in her face and states, “I’ve decided it would be best for you if we date. When you finish reading this, I’ll be waiting in my truck.”<sup>1</sup>*

Greitenbach says that Charley is his metaphor for the traditional approach to evangelism. There’s very little genuine friendship happening. When churches do befriend unbelievers it’s often so that they might become Christians. Often it’s assumed that the way to become Christian is for them to see how truly bad they are. Surely, not-yet-Christians see how disingenuous this is. True friendship is God’s calling, in and of itself. *If people find friendship with Jesus through*

*our friendship with them, that is the work of the Holy Spirit.* Instead of having such a combative, manipulative spirituality of engagement with others, we believe the church needs to recover a spirituality of engagement that *whispers* into the souls of not-yet-Christians. As Monty Roberts appeals to his wild mustangs’ *deepest longings*, we need to develop an ear for listening to such longings in our friends and engaging them with respect, grace and compassion.

How can we whisper into the deepest longings of not-yet-Christians? As we have already mentioned, listening is an essential element. As is the need to recognize that people are much more likely to come to faith *gradually* than through some cataclysmic Damascus-road experience. In 1992 an exhaustive study of over 500 Britons who had come to faith in the previous twelve months found that sixty-nine percent described their conversion as gradual. And it was not terribly different (sixty-three percent) in the strongly evangelical churches where dramatic conversions are anticipated. Overall, only twenty percent of converts described their experiences as dramatic or radical. The report suggested, *The gradual process is the way in which the majority of people discover God and the average time taken is about four years: models of evangelism which can help people along the pathway are needed.*<sup>2</sup>

We don’t ever want to rule out the possibility of God’s breaking into the consciousness of an individual and bringing about a dramatic, overnight turnaround in his or her life. But we have to be cognizant of the facts: most people are *whispered into the Kingdom slowly and graciously*. Holding so many evangelistic rallies or revivals simply reinforces our belief that people *only* come to faith like Paul on his way to Damascus. We also need to embrace a spirituality of engagement that can help us *whisper* to people as they seek to discover entry into the Kingdom of God.

This excerpt was taken from **The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Church**, by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, copyright © 2003 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., ISBN: 1-56563-659-7. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



<sup>1</sup> (Quoted in Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000) from J. Mack Stiles *Speaking of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity, 1995), 120.)

<sup>2</sup> John Finney, *Finding Faith Today* (London: Bible Society, 1992), 25.

# Out from the Upper Room

ADVANCING THE KINGDOM OF GOD  
34th Annual Lutheran Conference  
on the Holy Spirit • August 3-6, 2005

*"I will boast, then, about my Lord by saying that during the Holy Spirit Conference Mary (name changed) was baptized with the Holy Spirit, uttered praises to her Savior in a tongue he gave her, and couldn't wait to tell me about it on the phone as soon as she could. I almost fainted...Please pass along for me the testimony of a faith renewed, and a life blessed."*

Omaha, NE

## The Children's Conference:

*"Please thank everyone involved with this ministry. These words just aren't doing justice to what we experienced as parents from this ministry. Thank you from the bottom of our heart. I pray that you will see the fruit of your labor..."*

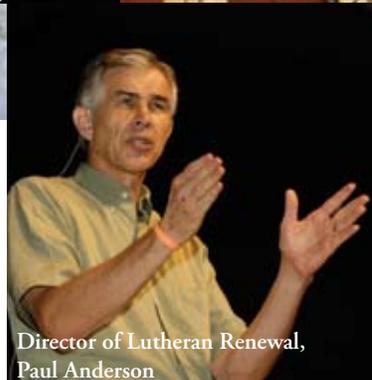
Weyauwega, WI



Reggie McNeal



Bill Johnson



Director of Lutheran Renewal,  
Paul Anderson



Wesley Campbell



*"God reinforced the message to me, once again, that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are to be used for blessing others. I will be able to bring this message more effectively to my college group."*

Minneapolis, MN

Michael Frost, one of the authors of the book from which this excerpt was taken, will be the speaker for our September 29-30, 2005 seminar, ***The Shaping of Things to Come—Re-Imagining the Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***. Brochures were sent with the August newsletter. You may print a brochure from our website at: [www.lutheranrenewal.org](http://www.lutheranrenewal.org).

If you are unable to travel to this seminar, we will provide live video streaming at a cost of \$20 per person. You will receive a user id and password when we receive your payment.

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\$20 per person (Deadline: received in our office by September 26)

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# Lutheran Holy Spirit Conference: *Out From the Upper Room*

August 3-6, 2005 Arden Hills, MN AUDIO AND VIDEO ORDER FORM

T=AUDIOTAPE CD=AUDIO CD V=VHS VIDEOTAPE D=DVD VIDEO

T	CD	V	D	CODE	SPEAKER	DESCRIPTION
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Due to contract restrictions, we can only sell Reggie McNeal's talks to those who actually attended the conference. If you attended and wish to order his talks, contact us for a specialized order form.

				05LU2	Thur AM	Bob Sorge	<i>Give Me the Old Altar</i>
				05LU3	Thur PM	Paul Anderson	<i>Realizing God's Dream For You</i>
				05LU4	Fri AM	Bob Sorge	<i>Four Kinds of Waves</i>
	2			05LU5*	Fri PM	Bill Johnson	<i>Heaven On Earth</i>

Bill spoke for 1 hr and 45 minutes so the 90 minute audiotape is missing the last 15 minutes.  
It took two CD's (\$16) to fit the entire talk. The DVD and VHS have the entire talk.

				05LU6	Sat AM	Bill Johnson	<i>The Transformed Mind</i>
				05LU7	Sat Aft	Wesley Campbell	<i>Praying The Bible</i>
				05LU8	Sat Eve	Wesley Campbell	<i>Mercy &amp; Social Justice for End Time Harvest</i>

## WORKSHOPS

				05LU9	Per Nilson	<i>Shark, Carp, Dolphin: Swimming With?</i>
				05LU10	Doug Pagitt	<i>Role of Community in Spiritual Life</i>
				05LU11	Dan Clites	<i>Engaging Culture By Church Planting</i>
				05LU12	George Johnson	<i>Deliverance Today</i>
				05LU13	Greg Pagh	<i>Elk River Story: Influencing Your Community</i>
				05LU14	Don & Elsie Fuhrman	<i>Empowered To Advance The Kingdom</i>
				05LU15	Mike Bradley	<i>You Are Not Disqualified!</i>
				05LU16	Bruce Kotila	<i>Silence: Pathway to Renewal &amp; Effective Ministry</i>
				05LU17	Merlin Morken	<i>To The Least of These: Ministry to "Down &amp; Outers"</i>
				05LU18	Bruce & Cindy Urban	<i>I Prayed To Be Filled With Spirit: Now What?</i>
				05LU19	Mark Herringshaw	<i>Micro Church Phenomenon in Mega Churches</i>
				05LU20	Jacquie Skog	<i>Domestic Violence Treatment &amp; Prevention</i>

## PASTORS' DAY

				05LU22	Wed. Afternoon.	Bob Sorge	<i>Lessons From The Captivity</i>
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## ARC SESSIONS

				05LU23	Fri. 1:30	Paul Anderson/Jim Fries	<i>Take A Look At ARC</i>
				05LU24	Fri. 5:00	Jim LaVallee	<i>Retirement Savings Available Thru ARC</i>

### ORDER SUMMARY:

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___ TOTAL VIDEOS ORDERED	X \$ 17 EACH	= _____
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___ ALL 8 GENERAL SESSION DVDs	x \$ 120 EACH		= _____

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