

We had a good crowd at the *God in the Box* showing on Sunday evening. The conversations were interesting, but I was most struck by the producer's comment at one point that **"It would sure make this a lot simpler if God just came out and said, 'Here I am!'"**



That is, of course, precisely the Christian affirmation—that *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* (John 1:14). It makes me sad that so many folk continue to make the very same mistakes over and over and over again: *"You study the Scriptures diligently,"* Jesus said, *"because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life"* (John 5:49-40).



Reflecting on these things caused me to remember a recent sermon illustration in which I invited you to consider a can of "juice." The label says "100% Sparkling Fruit Juice," and it's labeled as "cranberry," but examination of the ingredients reveals that cranberry juice is fourth and last on the list, after "carbonated water," "apple juice concentrate," and "white grape juice concentrate," and right before "natural flavors." The enticing pictures and clever labeling are decoys to sell a diluted, cranberry *flavored* product, disguised to look like something it isn't.

Erin Bunting, reflecting on such a discovery, wondered, "What if I had an ingredients label printed on me? Would Jesus be the main ingredient? If not, how far down the list would He be? . . . My packaging may be convincing. I may look and sound like the real thing. But what if someone came to me looking for Jesus beneath my 'Christian' label and found something else instead . . . something 'Jesus-flavored' but not 'Jesus-filled'?"<sup>1</sup>

Our challenge, and our opportunity, is to be in the world in such a "Jesus-filled" way, that we help our friends and neighbors to find their way to Him. And that's the motivation underlying the Spiritual Strategic Journey we began several months ago—to live out Jesus' Great Commandment and His Great Commission in such a winsome way that we help God's Kingdom to come in Columbia even as it is in heaven. Everything we do is intended to support that Goal.

**WORSHIP  
CONNECT  
GROW  
SERVE  
GO**

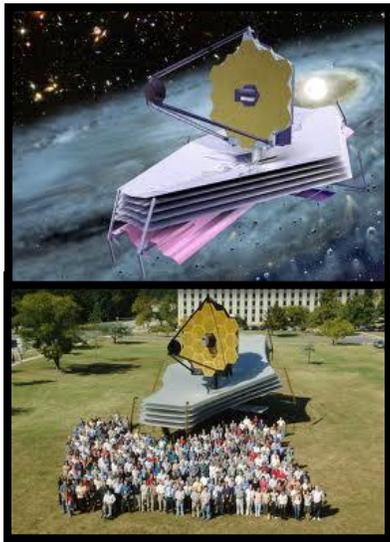
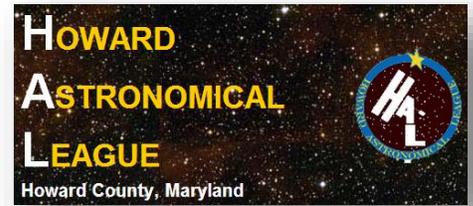
As we discussed in our Prayer Triplet Reporting Session on Saturday, we have some very interesting possibilities before us, and the primary way in which God will take us to a "new place" will be through our personal practice of "the Five Things." In this way, God's Spirit will transform us individually into the likeness of Christ, and as that happens, God's purposes for our fellowship over the next years will become clearer.

Those who study such things tell us that churches need to renew and rekindle their vision every 7-9 years in order to stay focused, effective, and vibrant. A number of factors are coming into play that make the years between here and 2020 most

<sup>1</sup> Erin Bunting, "Jesus Flavored, or Jesus Filled?" [www.Kyria.com](http://www.Kyria.com) (10.7.09).

interesting and exciting, and you'll hear more about these factors as our vision casting becomes more specific in the coming months. I actually had a very interesting experience along this line last week.

I've recently joined the Howard Astronomical League, and at last week's meeting the speaker was an astrophysicist who gave an update on the James Webb Space Telescope that is due to be launched in 2018 as the successor to the Hubble Telescope that has now been sending back incredible information about the universe for more than twenty years.



One of the most interesting things about the Webb Telescope is that it began to be imagined more than a decade ago—nearly fifteen years before it would actually be launched. And even though it is still five years until the Webb goes up, astronomers are already imagining the telescope that will go up after that . . . *and* the one after *that!*

That process of imagination is rather like what we're undertaking with our Spiritual Strategic Journey. Through the wisdom of God's Spirit, we're trying to catch glimpses of what God might intend to do through CBF, not just between here and 2020, but between 2020 and 2030 . . . and beyond. We're trying to imagine the unimaginable and to think the unthinkable. We're trying to envision that which is not yet and to bring it to birth, by God's grace and for God's glory!

So what might that look like? Toward what should our hearts incline and by what should our imaginations be captured? It's at this very point that our fellowship needs your help.

As I often do, I've attached several handouts with this *Laptop*. The one entitled "Strategic Thoughts" gives some ideas that may stir your imaginative juices a bit, especially the seven questions on the second page. The "Triplet Response Questionnaire" is to give you another opportunity to record the learnings and insights gleaned in your prayer together over the past two months, and "Leadership Reflections" is a strategic questionnaire by George Bullard of The Columbia Partnership. I hope you'll take some time to complete both of these and return them to the office for compilation as background for our strategic imagination.

Another handout is called "Developing Our Leadership Team," and that one gives you the opportunity to suggest persons among us who seem to you to be persons most likely to be able to imagine God's future for CBF over the next twenty years. The Church Council will use your recommendations in recruiting a visioning team for this process.

The Grand Adventure continues!

Dave

