

Notes on 2 Corinthians 5 : 19 ‘Typical Topics – metaphors to tell the mystery’

My teenage years were defined by symbols, as no doubt all of ours were. My heart would warm when I saw the Boys’ Brigade badge and I was proud to go to the school I went to. The main reason for this was because the BB badge and school crest were not just symbols, but they took on flesh and blood in the lives of the teachers and of the officers and friends I had in my BB company. Mr Kennett, who was Captain, lived a life that was very clearly anchored in the cross and I had some good friends who made life good. Symbols are metaphors in a picture format and last week we looked at 15 different word pictures to help understand, to know, to love the thickness and wonder of the cross. When we think of evangelism we are to do so as those who are themselves anchored in the cross learning and loving it more & more and inviting others to join this journey with us as fellow travellers.

You may glad to know but Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader are back on our screens. When I was 14 Star Wars was Good News to me but at Greenbelt, when I was 17, I discovered Jesus to be far better. As I looked at the lives of the Christians around me I had a real experience of community that relieved me of feeling alone and isolated and I knew I had been made whole by Jesus, and so I was no longer fractured. I was given a ‘Journey into Life’ booklet to help me understand more about this but now as I ponder how it describes the meaning of the cross, I wonder if this picture is still Good News today? Does it connect with and communicate the thickness and wonder of the cross to people today?

I ask this because of a book written by Alan Mann called “Atonement for a ‘Sinless’ Society” which dares to ask if the picture as described by ‘Journey into Life’ is too thin. He asks this because he sees the language of sin as being both meaningless and pointless because of our culture’s ever-changing vision of who we are today. He describes how today’s cultures describes the self being both isolated and fractured where we see ourselves as being more sinned against due to the vagaries of genetics, the power and remoteness of institutions and the questions posed by psychology then as a sinner. This does not mean that people have been set free into a glorious 60’s style of liberty. Instead, they have discovered that they are enslaved by the idea of shame in relation to how others view and treat them and in relation to themselves because they stand condemned as they never live up to the ideals, they aspire to for themselves.

Does this mean that Mann has abandoned sin? No, it doesn’t. Instead, he sees sin and our being convicted of it as being the result of an encounter with Jesus, and not its prerequisite, like in the story in Luke 5 verses 1 – 11 and Peter’s first encounter with Jesus. In our shame filled culture instead of jumping straight to sin perhaps we need to ask which of the 15 different metaphors I used last week speaks as Good News to those around us. In our self-harming and self-destructive culture instead of jumping straight to sin perhaps we need to ask which of these 15 different metaphors speaks as Good News to those around us.

In our lost, rootless and story deficient culture instead of jumping straight to sin perhaps we need to ask which of these 15 different metaphors speaks as Good News to those around us. In the light of the question I first asked Andy Kennett, who I had not seen for 40 years (how is life and what are you up to?) rather than jumping straight to sin, which of the 15 different metaphors do you think would be Good News to him?

Star Wars is a franchise that just keeps on giving and giving as it tries to thicken its story more and more. But the story of Jesus is a story which always has more for us to live, to feel and to learn. It reminds me of my old school crest. My school crest is a pelican that is bleeding because it was thought that it fed its young by its own blood. This myth acted as a metaphor for the cross and it became a fresh way of making the story of Jesus come alive again. Perhaps Mann is onto something fresh not to deprive us of what the cross is about, but that we may come to know Jesus even better.

Questions on 2 Corinthians 5 : 19 ‘Typical Topics – metaphors to tell the mystery’

1. Which of the 15 different word pictures I used last week to describe the cross can you still remember; which one and why?
2. How does the diagram below describe what the cross is about?
3. How do you respond to the suggestion of Mann that this diagram is ‘too thin’ to describe the meaning of the cross and its story of rescuing them from their isolation, fracture and shame?
4. How does Luke 5 verses 1 – 11 describe our being convicted of sin as something which is a consequence of our being met by Jesus?
5. Which of the 15 different metaphors from last week helps you grow in your understanding of the cross and is something you can share with others?

