

Along the track

Like Children

It is a wonderful experience to live with small children. It is easy to see why Jesus said: "I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mtt18:3). Not become children but like them again. They are easily amazed, they see the forgotten, the overlooked as well as the spectacular in the very ordinary. They love a story, and their imagination is a well-honed skill. We miss out on a lot in our scepticism, our need for proof, our desire to account for or explain everything instead of just rejoicing in the awe and wonder of the world around us everyday. Children don't have that problem.

That isn't a putdown of scientific endeavours or the enquiring mind. Where would we be without them? But each day we walk past a thousand, thousand natural miracles. Frustratingly at times, a small child doesn't. They have to look in wonder at everything despite the need for haste at times. The sun climbing in the sky or changing the sky into vivid colours as it sets, flowers, coloured leaves, snail trails. Just watching a worm can become an adventure, even if it is a pretty uneventful one to an adult eye. Those miracles are there waiting for us to see them, to notice them, delight in them but mostly we have to be led to them, to be shown by a child, and to try to answer the thousand and one questions that they never seem to stop asking. We are asked to 'become' as children, to grow into that again, to recover the gift of imagination, which children have in plentiful supply.

In the words of the poet William Blake:

To see a World in a grain of sand
Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Holy Infinity in the palm of your hand and
Eternity in an hour.

Have we buried the beauty, the wonder, the mercy and love of God in complex words and intricate formulas, arguing over their accuracy and orthodoxy while God sits by waiting? There is a story about a grade one student fully absorbed in drawing a picture. The teacher asked: "What are you drawing?" The student said "I am drawing God". "But no-one knows what God looks like," the teacher said. The student replied: "They will when I finish!"

Recently canonised Cardinal Newman wrote that: "the heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination". He wrote of working to build a bridge between the unbelieving head and the believing heart. Faith and imagination

go hand in hand. I am not suggesting that faith is fanciful but faith involves the capacity to see God in all things. Faith allows us to see the presence of the Spirit in the most unlikely places, it is open to the possibility of the hand and mind of God even in the most ordinary and mundane.

It is not just non-believers who lack this imagination but many believers as well. Yet Jesus used imagination often – he used images and metaphors, parables to convey and illustrate his message. He used images from the world around him to explain the life of the Spirit within, to explain God's presence and purpose. We have recorded much of his life and teachings in those parables and metaphors. They are not meant to be taken literally but rather it takes imagination to understand them and fully appreciate them. They show how God invites us to relationship, to discipleship.

As Christians we believe in an incarnate God, a God who became one of us in Jesus, a God who understands how we live and think, how we comprehend, relate and learn. Discipleship means becoming friends with God over a lifetime. Discipleship means discovering grace in the midst of our hopes and dreams, our relationships, our joys and challenges, our loves and hates, our disappointments, suffering and pain. We discover God in the ordinariness of our lives. We call that theology. Theology isn't something we have, rather it is something we do. And we do that over a lifetime. Paul wrote that God created all people "so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17 27).

Jesus asked us to imagine what the reign of God might look like. The reign of God is like a treasure in a field or a pearl of great price and so on. Like this little artist drawing God, we are asked to be creative, to imagine, to dream of what might be, what this reign might look like in our time and place.

Real discipleship is about cultivating a personal, mature relationship with God, being able to trust in times of uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, without having to reach after certainty, fact and a reason for it all.

Regards
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