

176 Theology grounded in reality

Sorry, I knew it wasn't actually likely that I would stop writing, but I thought it was worth a try – the previous article did feel like a natural conclusion. However, my theology is currently being tested in a real-life situation, so does it actually work in practice?

Remember 'Clara', aged 78?^[141] She was born into a dysfunctional family – and then things went downhill from there. She has suffered through unfaithfulness and illness, but at the time I got to know her, things were looking up: she had finally found a man who really loved her. But then in May, he died, and her children are not able to support her emotionally for various reasons, so in June I asked for your help.^[141,142]

How could I communicate to her the love that God has for her? You gave me practical guidance, for which I'm grateful, but I also wanted a way of communicating, in words, the good news of Jesus' love for her, words that a desperately lonely, damaged, injured individual could relate to.

Based on the theology that I have been working on, here are the sort of words (to complement my actions) that I feel I might be able to use to express God's love in Jesus – I have already been able to use some of them:

You are loved and accepted unconditionally by God (and by me); God is crazy about you! God understands all you've been through, the way you have been hurt by others, and God feels your pain. God has entered into that pain – indeed, into the pain of the whole world – by coming to earth as an individual human, Jesus, and he's been through hell-on-earth too.

Jesus suffered bereavement of family (his human father) and close friends (John the Baptist and Lazarus); and he was deserted by his friends. He endured injustice, physical pain, total abandonment and a suffered lonely, public death, derided by the onlookers.

Within weeks, his followers were somehow totally transformed, and the message that Jesus came to bring – of God's unconditional love for us – spread at amazing speed throughout the known world, and his followers were willing to face torture and death for what they believed.

However, as we all well know, we too hurt one another in all sorts of ways, so what God wants us to know is that in Jesus' non-violent opposition to evil there is a way of combatting evil and of restoring those broken relationships.

The 'how' of that restoration is a mystery that Christians use different ways to 'explain', but what we have experienced in our own lives is that if we believe what Jesus said, take him at his word, trust him, and try to apply it in our lives, it really does work – relationships can be restored.

And that includes our relationship with the whole of creation (which we're currently making such a good job of destroying).

Something like that, anyway. Amateurish fumblings, and still a bit theoretical, but please work with me, correct me if I'm wrong – let's refine it.