

## ***179 Full Circle – but I’m still wrong***

A few years ago, I managed to be so wrong that I ended up in a tiny sect who thought we were the only really ‘right’ people,<sup>[0,178]</sup> but God used that to show me the dangers of ‘being right’. Then I (re)discovered the value of community – a loving group of people, all of whom are wrong to a greater or lesser degree, but are loved and accepted by God.

Community is great, and this has been a constant thread in my articles, but another thread has been how and why did the early church explode so dramatically? Would my new ‘gospel of community’ really change the world?! My niggle is that this ‘community’ idea is still too individualistic: ‘me and my community’.

Let’s look at the ‘gospels’ that I’ve espoused during my life. Would they cause a massive movement that could change the world?

In the 60s/70s, we were preaching about a holy God, individual sin, and individual salvation. But people outside the church were massively unmoved because they heard the message as: God punishes people for ‘doing wrong’, and Christians are the arbiters of right and wrong. We talked, for example, about people ‘living in sin’ – I can see why ‘free love’ was so attractive, with its sense of community.

In the 80s/90s, came the charismatic movement that extended the message of ‘individual sin + Christian ethics’ to include individual gifts. Remember the huge emphasis on the gift of tongues?! And then came ‘power evangelism’, where gifts of prophecy and healing were used to bring people to salvation. And then the ‘prosperity gospel’: if you really had faith, you would receive wealth (and health and fame?). True, God did repeatedly tell Israel that if they were obedient they would prosper – but that was as a nation, not as individuals.

Right, so would ‘the gospel’, preached as any of the above, turn the world upside down? It certainly attracted opposition, but that was because of our ethical stands against divorce, abortion, Sunday trading, and so on.

So I’m back to my niggle: I’m having a lovely time with my new-found faith, and am revelling in the love I enjoy in my church – and OK, I have noticed that quite a lot of people on the fringes feel very positively towards us, but would this **really** turn the world upside down?

Sorry if I’m sounding negative, but I really don’t think that my faith (our faith?) as currently expressed is anything like as challenging (other than pointing ethical fingers) as the early church.

But I have detected a ray of hope as I fumble forwards in my journey. I’m reading Rohr’s ‘The Universal Christ’. OK, I don’t understand a lot of it(!), and OK, it worries me that he’s bordering on universalism, but there are threads that I want to pursue.

Did Jesus just come to bring a method of individual salvation or was it to bring something more... ..well, universal? The kingdom of God, maybe? What about Jesus as **Christ** – the universal king? So what **was** the message of the early church?

Thoughts, anyone?

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