

311 Community rules OK?

I'm not here to criticise anyone's church experience, but I am here to think, to learn and hopefully to change, to improve, to grow closer to how God wants me/us to be.

Last time, I reported my huge encouragement^[310] on moving to Norwich and attending a church where it was clear that we all wanted to 'spread the gospel'. In our previous home, where our two boys were born, there was one Anglican and one Methodist church, and that was it – without driving miles. Before that we had been in Kenya, where the local church was Kikuyu-speaking, and we sometimes drove 60 miles each way to Nairobi to attend the lively Baptist church! So in Norwich we chose a good church and then a house nearby.

So how has my thinking changed, since our latest church move? My faith revival started with Richard Rohr's *The Divine Dance*, and his insistence on relationship being central to faith – God *is* relationship. In my very first article,^[0] I explained how I had repeatedly found God's love... and then lost it again; this time I wouldn't let it go!

Looking back on seven years(!) of my articles, I can see mention of 'relationship' moving more towards an insistence on 'community'. And I've had some wonderful chats with my non-church-going educational-consultant son on this. We agree 100% that unless, as a society – indeed, as a world – we rediscover community we are doomed.

Contrasting the three churches above, the first had community, but (as I would have said then) I had to fight against part of the church in order to promote the gospel. In the second we were all like-minded, and Christians came from miles around to share that agreement, and promote that gospel.

So how has my thinking about the gospel changed? How does our understanding of the gospel *need* to change, if we are... I was going to write 'to survive',^[310] but is that my aim simply for the church to 'survive'?! I should be saying: How do we need to change to help our community by showing Christ as Lord?

How 'wide' is your faith? For me, it used to be about my own personal salvation, and then persuading others to receive personal salvation – not about saving the world.

If the gospel is to actually make a difference, the church needs to change. Thankfully, it has changed by accepting that we shouldn't exclude women from leadership; that nearly split the church. It took a lot of studying the Bible and debating, but it also needed a lot of being honest about our *feelings*. When we are trying to objectively interpret the Bible, our *feelings* are surprisingly powerful at affecting our sight.

So, yes, I want us to check our *feelings* very carefully, and not let them rule when we consider the current issue that's threatening to split the church. Personally, I feel that we should allow gay Christians to follow their own consciences, before God, and not insist that *our* interpretation of Scripture is 'right' – and let community rule.