

## ***The gospel, Brexit and world domination***

I thank God for those of you who have been walking with me on my journey, especially Sue, for being patient with a husband who is totally obsessed. Interestingly, my son Tim has had an input, too. As vice-principal of an international school, he's working towards a PhD on educational issues. I've been thrilled that, as I've read some of his papers, it seems he's on a similar track to me, albeit in a secular environment.

His thesis is that schools aren't about teaching but about learning: the whole school must be a learning **community**, teachers, pupils and parents. It's not about who's right and who's wrong; it's about how we can all help one another to learn, in the broadest sense of that word. And we learn by being part of a community, by being in relationship with one another.

And what have I been learning through these exciting few months?! The gospel is not about who's right and who's wrong or who's in and who's out; rather it's about being a learning community, all growing together in our relationship with God and with one another.

Now, you can't get a much less political animal than me, but as I see it, the politicians and media can't stop themselves turning everything into a who's right and who's wrong exercise – we've become blame-fault-shame-obsessed. Frankly, if we can't manage to stop concentrating our differences and start working together, as a community, across parties, in order to see how we can limit the damage, then we're going to be in a very, very serious mess (assuming it's not already too far gone).

So we need to pray desperately that God would help us and would inspire people to get off their high horses, start working together and protect the most vulnerable in society.

If I'm not political, I'm definitely not historical – I got a grade 9 at O level history (7, 8 and 9 were three different levels of failure). However, in my journey, I've been asking when, where and how did our view of 'gospel' turn into little more than a means of personal salvation, instead of being about a kingdom relationship? And here I wonder if I see a political link.

In the past, as I've looked at a world map – even one with the UK at the focus – and I've thought, 'How could this tiny group of islands ever have had such **massive** worldwide influence, through its colonial expansion?!' Amazing, isn't it?

And the other thing I've wondered at (and, if I'm honest, cringed over) is how the 'missionary expansion' came about. How much of a good thing was it that we took not just 'the gospel' (of personal salvation) but also education and medicine – and even more questionably our culture – and imposed them on such a huge range of different cultures, worldwide?

OK, I realise that all of the above is vague, wishy-washy thinking, but my feeling is that if we can rescue the gospel, the more beautiful gospel, the gospel of relationship, and help Christians and non-Christians alike to work together for the common good, we can hopefully make a real difference (and our Tim feels the same, secularly, within education).

'The church' in the time of those great missionary movements was very powerful, and now it's virtually powerless (in the UK, anyway). Why? Well, I think it's largely because we've concentrated so much on who's in and who's out, including which **church** is in and which is out. What a scandal that so much time and effort, not to mention bad feeling and even hatred, has accompanied the 'growth' of the church into its myriad, mutually incompatible denominations, sub-denominations and even non-denominations.

We have forgotten that the church was there to draw people in, regardless, full stop. We're here to include people, not to exclude them (as Jesus did?!). And our separating into denominations is largely motivated by fear: if we don't specify carefully enough what's right and what's wrong, who's in and who's out, then God won't bless us.

I praise God for the disparate community of people that I'm part of, here in Taverham; we come from various denominations and none, and are there because, when they stuck their head through the door of the church (and were at the time in a 'bad place', for one reason or another) they were welcomed, loved, accepted for who they were, and not told that they had to change in order to be accepted. And then – surprise, surprise! – as soon as they meet someone else who sticks their head through the door, they make damn sure this new person feels welcomed!

But I am very worried about Brexit, and I should be praying more that we get a workable solution. And if it really goes seriously wrong, then we, as those who have experienced God's loving welcome, will have an even bigger job to do to protect the most vulnerable. If the price of food rockets, and the rich grab the lion's share, to protect their own families, the outcome could be devastating.

To come back to something Tim wrote, as part of the underlying rationale for his educational ideas:

*...consider the way we frame our dominant global economic system, replete with concepts of **scarcity** and **accumulation**. If these conceptual foundations were transformed to notions of **abundance** and **gift** the implications for research and development of the system would be profound (Eisenstein, 2011).*

(The reference is to a book called 'Sacred Economics'.)

High-flown educational language, maybe (this was from a paper written in support of Tim's application to a school in Florence), but can you see the idea? If we share, there's enough to go around, but if we are selfish and just protect our own, then we create scarcity, and the poor starve. And can you see how the idea of 'abundance and gift' is almost synonymous with the gospel, while 'scarcity and accumulation' are trademarks of the 'who's in and who's out' way of thinking?

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