



Wood For The Trees

I recently saw a meme on social media which depicted a post someone had put up on Twitter (now called X since it was acquired by Elon Musk). In this "tweet", the poster asked: "You are stuck on a desert island. You have the Bible with you. What 5 other books would you also want?"

I was intrigued by the question, and immediately began thinking about which 5 other books I might like to have with me in addition to the Bible. It wasn't until after I had thought about this and mentally compiled my list that I realised the meme also included some of the responses people had posted to the original question. Most of the replies were of the same nature as my own: people listed the 5 books they most loved and nominated these as the other books they'd want with them.

Finally, at the bottom of the list of replies, someone wrote: "I think I would want 5 books about survival and how to build a boat".

It was only then that the penny "dropped" and I realised what a fool I and all the other responders had been. Of all of us, only one person had "twigged" to the fact that if you were stuck on a desert island, having 5 books that would actually help you get off the island and get to safety would be the only five books you'd want to have. The Bible might help you with prayer and consolation and retaining a sense of God's presence in your circumstances - but it wouldn't show you how to collect food safely or construct the means for your escape.

Any more than the collected works of Dostoevsky, Shakespeare or Jane Austin!

Once I realised the point of the meme, of course I burst out laughing - at my own foolishness, if nothing else. It reminded me of a cartoon by the brilliant American cartoonist Gary Larson, which depicts a man stuck on a desert island saying to a genie who has emerged from a bottle to grant him three wishes: "Let's see...I've got rhythm, I've got music...what more could I want?"

Both the meme and the cartoon are examples of not being able to see the wood for trees. Sometimes, when we focus too narrowly - or too literally - on what is immediately in front of us, we fail to see the broader context - a context that might, in fact, be the answer to the question we are trying to resolve. Of course, there are times when details do count, and we need to pay attention to the minutiae. But even in these instances, we need to retain an awareness that details do not exist in isolation; on the contrary, they exist in the context of other details - details that might, in fact, be more relevant than the ones on which we are fixated.

Easter is a good example. People tend to shun Good Friday because they find it "depressing", or because they don't want to be confronted by uncomfortable narratives about death, or betrayal, or the terrible alienation from God which Jesus experiences on the Cross. Instead, they would much rather focus on Easter Day, on the happy, joyous event of the Resurrection, and the hope and promise which it embodies. But while understandable, this response ignores the context of Easter Sunday: namely, that it cannot take place without Good Friday. The joy and the hope and the promise go together with the death and the suffering and the injustice - precisely because the latter reveals the extent to which God is prepared to go for our sake in order to secure the former.

Likewise with Christmas. The Christmas narrative which people of faith and no faith alike construct - and which is culled from different parts of various Gospel

accounts - acts as though Christmas were a "one off" or "stand alone" event. However, this ignores the context in which Christmas operates: namely, that it stands in the shadow of the Cross. God's total solidarity with suffering humanity, which occurs in and through the events of Good Friday, cannot occur unless God is prepared to come into the world as one of us, in order to live our human life and experience the full vulnerability of what it means to be human. The three events - Christmas, Good Friday and Easter - don't occur in isolation, but are part of the broader context of God's unconditional love for creation. When we treat them as though they were isolated occurrences, we fail to see the wood for the trees - we are so stuck on the minutiae that we are blind to the bigger picture.

So as we approach this forthcoming Christmas season, let us both dwell on the detail of the Christmas event itself, as well as retain a sense of the broader context into which that event fits. Let us see the "big picture" Christmas Day points to instead of just viewing Christmas Day as a self-contained "occasion". Because just as "no man is an island" (to quote John Donne) so no event on the Christian calendar "just is". We are always being called to look beyond the specific toward the universal.

Combined Service This Week

The next combined service with our neighbours at Ringwood Uniting Church will occur on Sunday 26th November at 10am, On this occasion, HUC will be hosting the service.

Remember For Your Diaries

There will be an important Meeting of the Congregation following the morning church service on Sunday 3rd December. The agenda for the meeting will include:

Presentation of the proposed budget for 2024

Membership of the Church Council

Report from the Church Council on the future of the congregation.

- Tom Gay, Chairperson of the Congregation.

Halleluiah Chorus Concert

On Wednesday 13th December at 7:30pm, Ringwood Uniting Church will host a rendition of George Fredrich Handel's famous Halleluiah Chorus. But it won't be just any old concert - attendees will also have the opportunity to join in the singing of this Christmas favourite. For full details [click this link](#).

Presbytery Newsletter

The latest edition of the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra Newsletter is now available. Please [click this link](#) to read.

Salvation Army Christmas Concert

The Salvation Army's Melbourne Staff Band are holding a concert on Saturday 2nd December at 7:30pm. Featured guests include vocalist Alana Conway and Carey Grammar's Vivace Junior School Choir. For full details [click this link](#).

Blessings,

Brendan



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