

SERMON FOR DISCUSSION: Still learning

"From the Heart" Song of Solomon 2 v8-13 Mark 7 v1-8

Listen! My beloved! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills.

⁹ My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.

Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

¹⁰ My beloved spoke and said to me,

"Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me.

¹¹ See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.

¹² Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. ¹³ The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.

Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."



Here is a self-portrait in old-age by a famous artist. It's by the Spanish painter de Goya. He is struggling to walk using walking-sticks and he called it **"I AM STILL LEARNING"**

He learnt to walk as a young boy (c.1747) and now he is learning to walk again in old-age.

"Learning again" is something we all need to do.

But how do we learn on a Sunday morning?

I, a Preacher, have the capacity to speak 125 words a minute but you, the congregation, have the ability to listen to 400. THIS MEANS THAT YOU are only occupying about 30% of your minds right now and you are holding 70% in check!

So, I have a problem, don't I !!?

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It's called THE FOURTH WALL, which is a term which comes from the Theatre.

A Theatre has three physical walls and then AN IMAGINARY FOURTH which separates the message of the actors from being communicated fully to the audience.

The question is:

-How do I overcome this 4th Wall?

-How can I engage the 70% of your minds you are not giving me?

Answer: In TWO ways.

ONE I have known a long time **and that is the use of IMAGES** so your mind can take in both through your ears and through your eyes. What I say and what you see.

The image allows your imagination to work and making connections.

So I don't think I have ever preached at 10.30am without Powerpoint or video, except when a virus prevented what I had prepared from working!

And so today our first Bible Reading, the Song of Solomon, from the Old Testament is IMAGE STRONG.

⁸ Listen! My beloved! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills.

⁹ My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.

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Yes, the Bible has its relentless logic – St Paul, for example, Romans 10 v14

How can people call on the One they have not believed in?

And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard?

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

BUT, more often, the Bible communicates through imagery:

Elisha used a bow & arrow to prophecy victory to the King

Ahijah the Prophet tore up his new cloak into 12 pieces to indicate that God would tear the Kingdom away from Solomon

Hosea married an unfaithful woman

Jeremiah bought a field to demonstrate the faithfulness of God

David likened God to a Shepherd

Jesus used a child to illustrate the nature of the Kingdom of God

-a farmer sowing seed to illustrate the nature of our response

-and a pearl-beyond-price to illustrate the real value of faith

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They, and many others throughout Scripture, used imagery to communicate an important message.

And sometimes imagery is the ONLY way.

For example, HOW does one communicate love?

We *could* explain it thus in a graph:

Love happens when dopamine levels rise and serotonin levels fall!

Love is chemistry!

We *could* just use three plain words: "I Love You"

And we *could* use imagery:

See! My beloved. The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.

Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.

Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

I think you'll agree that imagery is the best way of the three.

And what of the image of flowers in the Song of Solomon?

What is the use of roses and lilies and flowers? **They are of NO USE AT ALL except for joy and delight.** With their delightful colours and sweet fragrance we are pleased. They are not necessities. They are for our joy.

And so the 'meaning' is that faith in Jesus Christ is flowers as well as bread; There is beauty to behold.

Images and symbols awake an interest in people and entice us to move beyond what we already know. Images and symbols encourage people to look at things in a new way.

Cardinal Dulles in a thought provoking book (A History of Apologetics) said, **"the contemporary crisis of faith IS A CRISIS OF IMAGES"**

In an age of Facebook and high quality cameras on every phone, talk is not enough.

The church needs to 'learn again' how to communicate in story and imagery.

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-How can I try to overcome THE FOURTH Wall?

-How can I engage the 70% of your minds you are not giving me?

First, through imagery. **And second, through SILENCE.**



And this is what I have learnt this week from the Vicar of Shepherd's Bush, Bob Mayo.

I claim no expertise in this but pass on what he says. Which is:

"Silences changes a speech into a sermon.

A speech is informational,
whilst a sermon is experiential, relational and transformational.

Silences turn an audience into a congregation.

An audience is passive.

A congregation is participative.

It is in the silences that people make their choices.

Words provoke -but silence echoes.

Words challenge -but silence encourages"

Silence is hugely important for communication to take place.

Bob Mayo says,

***"When I have finished my sermon I sit down and wait.
I am as interested in the silence which follows,
as I am in the words that have gone before."***

Because if God does NOT speak to us and we DON'T respond we will be like those Isaiah (29 v13) and Jesus condemned in Mark 7 v6:

***"A people who honour me with their lips
but their hearts are far from me."***

Silence is good for our hearts and souls.

Are we, like de Goya, STILL LEARNING?

Perhaps SILENCE will be our great teacher?

Preached by the Revd Martin Tanner in St Mary's Church, Market Drayton on Sunday 30th August 2015 at 10.30am based on article by Bob Mayo