

Reflections from The Hill – Robes, Greetings and a Combo

I confess that I'm a bit of a peacock when it comes to ecclesiastical haberdashery. The flashier and more colourful the gear, the bigger the ego.

My Cheese reckons it's because I haven't grown up yet and maybe she's right. I seem to remember faint examples of me trying to run faster than a speeding bullet while wearing the Superman cape that my mum had made.

There is a serious side to all that clobber, though. In fact, part of my faith journey involves the primary attraction church robes had on me. It was only years later that I discovered – and fell in love with – Jesus, an altogether love-filled option.

But that's only part of the story, too, because the next eureka moment I had was when I figured out that what I believed significantly affected what I did.

Such was the power of that discovery that it was like getting a combo pack at Macca's: one without the other just didn't satisfy.

Right beliefs and right actions are God's combo and go together like an Angus Burger and Chips. Man, what a deal.

When Jesus starts on about the Pharisees and their clobber and their strutting and their demanding good seats, as He does in the week's Gospel, I get more than just a tinge of conscience. It's more like a fire alarm, for I've been there, too.

Not only did Jesus call into question their knowledge of serious things (like God and stuff like that) but He laid bare their hypocrisy and impious motivations.

But that's not all. He pointed out that it was their greed, exercised at the expense of those who were the softest targets, widows, which also deserved a serve.

Jesus is always harshest on those who claim to be believers, and who don't back it up. It's a bit like only having one part of the combo. One commentator I read said it like this: "Those who give to God a few moments worship in church once a week while ignoring God in the rest of their life will suffer from religious schizophrenia."

We Anglicans, like many in other parts of the Christian family, are notoriously weak, or even schizophrenic, when it comes to Bible knowledge, interpretation, and systematic theology. We'd rather pay the so-called experts to give us the good oil rather than to be boring ourselves. Lord, have mercy.

Where, for example, did we ever get the idea that it's only the clergy who need training in the faith? And even some of them are a bit dodgy, I'm told, but none that you know, I'm sure.

Is it time to re-organise our thinking to incorporate some serious faith-learning at our local Parish level? I reckon we might be surprised at who'd walk through our doors if we could be seen to be offering some good stuff.

People aren't looking for entertainment. People are looking for a transcendent God; people don't want information, they want transformation. What we've been offering just doesn't cut the mustard any more. Look at our parish attendance figures if you don't believe me.

It's a scary thought that people are rejecting Jesus because of the church. We were once called 'Christians' by a disbelieving world; now we call ourselves 'Christian' and the world

calls us hypocritical. We are no longer relevant or transcendent. We have become, in the worst of possible ways, religious. Christ, have mercy.

The world is often put off by the church. We have to take an honest look to see why this is so. Are we fulfilling the mission and purpose of God, or have we missed it in some significant way? Are we turning people to Christ or turning them away from him?

Jesus wants real disciples, all churches want real disciples, and the world wants to see something real. So, what do we do? First and foremost, be like Jesus and declare an all out war on hypocrisy.

There is more to being Christian life than just correct belief, as important as that is. The early Jews thought so. To them, it was not only about what a person believed, but how they lived it. They had law after law that dictated daily life, and the whole purpose of the rabbi and spiritual leaders was to teach orthopraxis, correct practice.

Jesus thought so, too. To him, it wasn't enough to preach the Kingdom, He had to live it as well. He lived out every single one of his teachings. He healed, he lived in poverty, he dined with the undesirable.

And in the ultimate act of correct practice, he died on the cross to live out that truth that there is not greater love than that a man lay down his life for someone else.

The early church thought so, as well. Bishop Bill often says that it's no accident that the book after the Gospels in the New Testament is called "The Acts of the Apostles". It's a book on correct practice. It's a book that shows what living the right way could do in people's lives but, more importantly, it's about what living right can do in the lives of those around us.

So here are my questions: Can we say that we seek orthopraxis as easily as we seek orthodoxy? When we visit a church, how often do we ask what is the church doing for the poor and marginalized of the community? Or do we just go along for the ride?

When we read a Statement of Faith how often do we look for a corresponding Statement of Actions? When we evaluate a clergyperson, how often do we ask ourselves about his/her character, his/her love for God and people, his/her praxis?

Or ourselves, how often do we feed the poor or love the unlovable after hearing all those sermons about it? How often do we ask "How can I live better? How can I represent Jesus more effectually? How can I live up to the call to be his hands and his feet?"

I have come to a point in my life where I think that as good as it is to seek truth and proper belief, the over-pursuit of these has left us in a state of physical paralysis; a state where our brain is engaged but where we are unable to be the Church that God has intended; that instead of being a blessing, we are more of a curse. Lord, have mercy.

Ortho-(correct)-doxy (belief) and ortho-praxis (practice) go together, about that there is no doubt. They are God's combo to satisfy the hungry and empty soul that is both in us and in others.

As we put up our hand today to cooperate with God in all things and try to listen to what He is saying to us, it is surely better that we not only seek to believe, but that we seek to live, too.

One-liner of the week:

With proper diet, rest, and exercise a healthy body will last a lifetime.

Humour of the week:

A drunk and a preacher were driving up a mountainside in different vehicles. The drunk was swerving from side to side; the preacher was driving straight and true. All of a sudden, the preacher lost control and drove off the edge of a cliff.

The drunk noticed the preacher going off the edge, so he stopped his car and went to see if he was all right. He noticed the preacher was climbing up the hillside. He yelled down at the preacher, "Are you alright?" And the preacher replied, "Have no fear my son, I had the Lord riding with me."

The drunk then yelled back, "You had better let him ride with me next time, because your gonna get him killed."

Quote of the week:

Be careful with your thoughts, for your thoughts inspire your words. Be careful with your words, for your words precede your actions. Be careful with your actions, for your actions become your habits. Be careful with your habits, for your habits build your character. Be careful with your character, for your character decides your destiny.

A big week is planned for the Mackay Region. The Bishop is re-Consecrating the new Chapel at the Good Shepherd Lodge on Friday; this weekend is their Regional Consultation and, on Thursday next, Rev'd Ann Dittmar-McCollim will be inducted at Holy Trinity. It's a joy to welcome Ann and Keith to the Diocese and I look forward to having them part of the Church family in these parts.

Keep well, stay hot for God and cool under pressure. Love much and laugh heaps.

In His Grip

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He is no fool who gives away something he cannot keep to gain something he cannot lose - Jim Elliott