

Sermon - "Sharing the Light" (a 'Real Bloke' story)

A few years ago, I felt I was being challenged to go beyond the theories and technical terms and high-sounding ideals of being a Christian. It was as if I was being told to 'get real with God' – get down to earth. Out of this, over time a book – *A Real Bloke Meets God* – grew. This is most definitely not straight theology or Biblical scholarship, though I'm pretty sure it's all in there. Rather these were stories about a 'real bloke' who has the experience of God bursting into his life. This bloke is not a regular church-goer, but he and the Lord have some interesting conversations and begin to develop quite a relationship. In the years since, I have continued to write about this real bloke and his encounters with God. Their relationship has grown and keeps developing. There have been times when a particular issue or question has come up, and I have turned it over to this real bloke and God to see what they make of it – and it kind of develops a life of its own. So I thought I would do that with our present situation – and this is the result it's called "Sharing the Light" ...

Sharing the Light

It was late on Monday night. Everyone else was in bed. I was sitting in my favourite armchair with a cup of coffee, wondering. Wondering just what was going on in the world? Just what was going to go on? I have never experienced anything like it – and I tell you it was beginning to get to me. This virus situation had the whole world in its grip. Our little country had been in lockdown for three weeks now.

That is, no going to work for me. No school for Brandon and Paul. No odd jobs for Patti. No trips out. No visiting our friends. Just staying around home. It had been kind of an "adventure" at first. An enforced holiday. We had played outside with the boys; caught up on some jobs around the house; learnt a few new board games.

But now ... well ... how long was it going to go on? I worried about us catching the virus and getting sick. The chances of that were supposedly pretty low as long as we

followed the rules. But what about my job? Would I still have one? How long could we survive? There was still a mortgage and bills to pay. And I know we were doing much better than other countries, but who knew what it was going to be like afterwards. Always assuming there was an "afterwards". I put on a brave face for Patti and the boys, but the whole situation was really getting to me.

I took another sip of coffee, wondering if perhaps I needed something stronger. Perhaps I should look in the bottom cupboard for that bottle of whisky somewhere at the back?

"That's not the answer is it?" came a voice from the chair beside me. It was the Lord. The Lord God, Creator of everything that was and is; Redeemer and Sustainer of Life. I was by now pretty used to him just turning up – especially when I was feeling like I did now.

"No. Perhaps not. But I was thinking a that a good stiff drink might help keep my spirits up." I gave a half hearted chuckle.

It seemed the Lord was not amused.

"This all down to you?" I said. No sense in beating about the bush. Perhaps it was not the wisest move on my part to be so confrontational, but things were serious. I was worried. Very. I had some real questions and so far had not managed to come up with any decent answers.

"This, what do they call it, 'global pin, pon, pen' thing?"

"Pandemic," said the Lord helpfully.

"Yes, that," I said. "Is it your doing?"

"I'm not sure what you mean?"

"It's pretty straight forward. We have this virus which has rapidly spread throughout the world. Killing people. Upsetting everything. Kind of reminds me of some of those Biblical plagues and stuff. So, are you responsible?"

I was getting pretty worked up but the Lord seemed unusually calm. He spoke softly and carefully: "I did not cause this to happen."

“So it's not your judgement on a sinful world? You're not going to wipe us all out?”

The Lord answered gently, “My judgement upon this world was to come among you in the person of my son Jesus. To share your life and show you the way. My judgement on this world was to die on the cross, with all the sins of the world – past, present and future – so that you and Patti and Brandon and Paul and all the people of the world would have the gift of new life.”

I thought of countries with huge death tolls. Grieving families, failing economies, distressed people. “Doesn't seem to be doing much good does it.” I knew I was on dangerous ground challenging the Lord God. But this was an unusually desperate time.

The Lord seemed to nod and wipe a tear from his eye. “It breaks my heart that people, my people, are hurting and suffering.”

“But you could stop it! You could change it!” I blurted out without thinking.

“Sorry, but it doesn't work like that,” the Lord responded. “I am here. I will always be here. I have promised that light will always overcome the darkness – and it will. I will walk with you giving you strength and peace and courage to face whatever happens and come through ...”

Once again I found myself on shaky ground, but couldn't stop myself asking, “How can that work? How can that possibly make any difference?”

“It already has,” the Lord replied. “There is the selfless caring of nurses and doctors and health professionals and carers. People giving so generously of their time and resources. Others who although they cannot physically visit, keep in touch with their neighbours and make sure they have the food and supplies needed. The homeless being housed and fed. People going out of their way to share joy and laughter. People doing their best to

carry on with as much as they can of ordinary life in very difficult circumstances.

“I know you are worried. About your family. Your job. The bills which have to be paid. The uncertain future. And you are not alone worrying and wondering who is responsible? Why is this happening? It is more important to focus on how you will get through this – because you will.”

It was like the Lord was reading my mind.

The Lord continued, “That is what my people, in their churches, are doing: focussing on helping people and keeping hope alive.”

Now I'm not too good, actually no good at all, when it comes to computers and technical stuff. But Patti had got our laptop working and connected so we could be part of our local church's “live river” ...

“Ahem,” the Lord interrupted my thoughts, “I think you mean 'livestream’”.

Right. A “*livestream*” we watched in our lounge at the time that there would normally have been a service at the church building. It was not the same as church church, but it was kind of like being there and being together. And the Vicar had said followers of Jesus were to do just what the Lord had said to me.

“There you go then,” said the Lord. “The message is getting through. I see you have taken it to heart.”

“I'm sorry,” I said. “Have I missed something?”

“On the contrary. You have done just what was needed. For example, I notice you have been putting some baking over your back fence ...”

He noticed that, I thought to myself? Then I remembered: the Lord notices everything. Under Patti's direction we had all spent a day baking – which we then shared with our grumpy neighbour over the back; and that other one with the annoying dog.

Brandon and Paul had drawn brightly coloured pictures and encouraging words and plastered them all over

our front windows. Patti and I took turns phoning our elderly neighbours. And we had done some shopping for that family down the street who had no car ...

“There you go then,” smiled the Lord

“That makes a difference?” I asked.

“More than you can imagine,” replied the Lord.

I looked over at the Lord. Really looked. He seemed as concerned about this whole situation as I was. I began to have a different angle of thinking. The Lord God, Creator of the whole entire universe, Lord of space and time, was concerned about what was happening in the world. Concerned about what was happening in my neighbourhood. Concerned about my family. About me. And not just concerned but involved. Wow! This was staggering!

It seemed I could feel an arm around my shoulder, and a gentle squeeze. “I know this situation is really getting to you. You are not on your own. You have a lovely wife. Talk with her. You have two wonderful sons, family and friends who care. And then there is me. Always remember I am with you. Every step of the way.

“There is a future. These are difficult times. But there will be a new beginning.”

“You know what happens don't you?” I said.

“Ah,” the Lord smiled, “that would be telling.”

And he was gone.

In one sense nothing had changed. There was still a world-wide pandemic. Our country was still in lockdown. And yet my world was now different. There was light. A bright unwavering light shining in my darkness.

“And don't you forget it,” it seemed I heard a voice say. “And share it. Remember to share it.”