

The Road Less Travelled

Divine Community Church, Dudley

Sunday 26th October 2014

Theme: Ministry to people in prison and ex-offenders.

Introduce Brian Phillips and Zoe Reid

Brian Phillips FGBMFI speaker and Prison Fellowship Leader for HMP Birmingham

Launch of "Living Well Church" in Ladywood Sunday 20th October 2014.

Brian - Testimony

Zoe - Dance

The Road Less Travelled

 Personal History

 Research Project for MA - M Scott Peck "The Sacred Disease" and "The Road Less Travelled" and many other sources 2000 - 2004.

 Foundations of Recovery - CRI Atlantic House (Dudley Integrated Drug and Alcohol Service) 2014.

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Matthew Chapter 7: Verses 13 - 14

Three Key Questions:

1. Why do so few find it?
2. Why is it so difficult for ex-offenders to find a home in the local Church?
3. Does Church Culture help or hinder the integration of ex-offenders?

✚ Recovery Groups - Alcoholic Anonymous; Narcotic Anonymous etc etc etc

These are the "Church" for many people who have gone through the prison system and faced the challenges of addiction. However, such groups are not recognised by many Church groups and considered cultic.

Philip Yancey in "What is so Amazing about Grace?" records the time that he attended A.A. with a recovering alcoholic friend:

"The first time I accompanied him I was overwhelmed by what I found, for in many ways it resembled the New Testament church"

M Scott Peck in "The Sacred Disease" gives three reasons why A.A. and other Recovery programmes work:

Reason 1:

It is a Religious programme; the only programme for religious conversion to God, teaching them (the addicted) to go forward through the desert.

We cannot go back to Eden. The way is barred.

"After he (God) drove man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."

Genesis Chapter 3 Verse 24.

M Scott Peck shares how people became conscious as a result of the fall of Man. They can respond to this in one of two ways:

They can regress - a yearning to go back to the womb, or to the Garden of Eden pre fall of Man

They can progress - a powerful calling to God and yearning for the Spirit

It is impossible to go back to the Garden of Eden or the womb. The only way is forward through the desert to salvation and the knowledge of God. Recovered anorexic sufferer Helena Wilkinson shares how she was helped through her eating disorder by meditating on Psalm 23. The Hebrew word for shepherd *Ro'eh* is related to neighbour, friend and *Re'ah* which shows love and community.

She comments on the need to recognise the context. The word for pasture - *mid-bar* can be translated "desert" or "wilderness."

This is true. The only successful passage of recovery is the road through the desert. This involves having the will, and motivation to move forward.

Reason 2:

It is a Psychological Programme; teaching you how to go through the desert.

M Scott Peck in the book "The Road Less Travelled" suggests ways in which facing our difficulties - and suffering through the changes - can enable us to achieve a higher level of self-understanding.

He writes of the dilemma we all have in resisting God's grace, and the consequent feelings of not coping with a merciless and overwhelming world. The answer is, he says, is to rise to a position of spiritual power and heed the call of God's grace. Rather to blame powers above us for our condition, we need to look at ourselves.

Paul writing to the Roman Church identifies with this issue.

Paul's Wretched Man - Romans Chapter 7 - 26.

Elsewhere, his prayer for the Church in Thessalonica:

May the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole Spirit, soul and Body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it."

1 Thessalonians chapter 5 Verses 23 - 24

M Scott Peck suggests two ways that A.A. groups help the process:

1. Parable

Twelve Steps makes use of story and aphorisms. Sentences are memorised such as "One Day at a Time."

Yancey writes:

Over time I saw that A.A. runs on two principles; radical honesty and radical dependence. These are the same two principles expressed in the Lord's prayer.

2. Sponsorship

People from prison backgrounds and dependency culture find it very hard to make friends who are "clean." Some only know friends who are in the culture.

A.A. groups help with this:

Provision of a sponsor:

"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother."

Proverbs Chapter 18 Verse 24.

Missiologist David Bosch in his book *Transforming Mission* writes:

The disciples of Jesus's time are.....not just linked to the first disciples but also to one another. Every disciple follows the master, but never alone; every disciple is a member of the fellowship of disciples, the body, or no disciple at all."

Reason 3:

It is a Community Programme; meaning you do not have to go through the desert alone.

God's call to Abraham:

*I will make you (Abraham) into a great nation
And I will bless you.
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you
And whoever curses you I will curse;
All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

Genesis 12 Verses 2 - 3

The making of community has always been the divine plan for the salvation of man. Today, community life is not as it has been in past years, apart from the social media. However, community is built through tragic experiences, trials and difficulties. Here are three examples:

- The tragedy of Soham. Ian Huntley murdered Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.
- Many people are mourning a past crisis. Remembrance Day!
- Today's persecuted Church

Our response, and the eyes, hands and feet of Jesus:

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
And recovery for the sight of the blind,
To release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

Luke Chapter 4 Verses 18 - 19

Jesus Christ in the Synagogue announces his Messianic fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy in
Isaiah 61: 1 - 2