

Living on the edge...

A quarterly newsletter by Ron Taylor Superintendent

Our students are being raised in a culture of transition—an era that is presently challenging many assumptions widely accepted in days past. As we move ever further into the 21st century, the complexities ahead, combined with the failings behind, are leading many to reconsider much of what was accepted as common knowledge.

Through the Enlightenment, we came to accept a fixed universe, a universe that could be understood through investigation, empiricism, and rational thought. Universal understandings could be applied to all of life, but were largely limited to what was “natural,” seen, and observable. Phenomenon outside of this fixed perspective was only presently unexplainable; but ultimately, these phenomena would be understood through a naturalistic understanding of knowledge, *so the thinking went*. The concepts of rationalism and naturalism dominated the collective mindset of Western thinkers.

The boundaries imposed by empirical and naturalistic thinking are being questioned by scientists, students, professors, mothers, fathers, baristas, and clerics. Many individuals, particularly young adults, and today’s students, are increasingly open to wonder, mystery, and the unexplainable. Have you taken note of the television shows built on these themes? Enter *Oprah*, *The Ghost Chasers*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Joan of Arcadia*. And the big screen is replete with movies symbolizing something beyond our natural selves. I offer *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and the upcoming *Lion*, *Witch*, and *the Wardrobe* as recent examples. Increasingly, our culture is accepting an open universe and searching for a “Purpose-Driven Life,” a connection with something, someone, some force outside of what is known.

For those of us earnestly seeking to understand and follow the teachings of Jesus, this is encouraging news. We have an obvious “connecting point” because we all are searching for meaning to our lives. All of us, in this culture, can freely enter into conversations about meaning with others,

knowing these deeply spiritual questions are at the forefront of our collective thinking. And yet, a serious challenge is also before us.

In a global and pluralistic world in which our children “live and breath,” spiritual quests—while important—can often challenge the teachings of Christ. This quest for spiritual meaning and connectedness is desirable. However, to those on this quest, truth is often found through selecting items contained in the “spiritual smorgasbord” available to all seekers. In this context, each truth is individually selected to fit the spiritual needs of each seeker; whereby, selections equally nourish the soul. The adage, “all paths lead to the same end,” applies; so much for a “narrow way.”

Of equal concern, in a world seeking for its essence, is the rejection of any meta-narrative (story) big enough to be universally true. Accordingly, no storyline, or meta-narrative, can be inclusive enough to extend through all cities, regions, nations, and peoples. The biblical narrative, therefore, cannot be extended to all of humanity. Although historical evidence supporting scriptural claims can, and do, verify the authenticity of a sacred text (the Bible), this evidence does not necessarily give credence to its universal truth claims. So how does one speak of scriptural truth in a neo-paganistic environment?

Enter... Jesus.

Jesus was explicitly clear about truth. To many in this culture, such certainty about truth is nearly incomprehensible, offering a striking challenge to the biblical storyline, which states all of life, can be and is, enveloped by a Christian perspective (worldview).



Ron Taylor,
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In John 14, Jesus had just finished speaking the haunting words of Peter's betrayal. The reader of this text feels the chilling effects of this statement on Peter and others present. It was as if confusion and fear had overtaken the room. Jesus, sensing the disturbing impact of this statement, moved to comfort his disciples by stating, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me...In my father's house are many rooms...I have prepared a place for you...I will come back and take you with me...You know the place to where I am going."

Thomas asked, "How can we know the way?" And Jesus boldly responded with one of his most emphatic statements, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but through me." A defining moment had come through this statement. Truth was *now* revealed in and through a person—Jesus Christ. He made it clear that truth can be known because He came to demonstrate truth in word and deed. Incarnate God had come to humanity, placing upon him all the pains and pleasures of life. Jesus, at this moment, articulated a meta-narrative, through his life, death, and resurrection that was "big enough" to encompass *all* of life.

A clearer picture of today's spiritual seeker (by the way, that includes you and me) is offered by author Don Hudson. "... think of the five-year-old who disrupts the best laid plans of the family or the teenager who begins to question a parent's faith. *This is why [this] moment is so terrifying to us. It is a reminder that we are out of control, and a place where we are invited to trust God who is beyond our comprehension* [italics mine]." Hudson very appropriately describes today's seeker as one "in search for the absent God [who is sifting] through the ruins of the 21st century."

What does one do with this information? I offer a few suggestions. First, as part of the Bellevue Christian School community, take joy in knowing our *primary* task is to articulate and demonstrate the biblical meta-narrative in and through *all* we teach. Secondly, our abiding task is that of discipleship, passing the transformative power of incarnate God to our students, and helping them do likewise through applying their gifts, talents, and abilities wherever God directs. Finally, when speaking to another about their search for meaning, keep the following in mind:

Tell your story

In a postmodern world, experience is truth. Your experiences of faith matter and, they matter greatly. Speak openly to others of your spiritual journey. Tell of God's provision. Discuss the times where God's absence was felt. Enter into dialogues with others about spiritual misunderstandings, questions, joys, and fulfillment. For it is in *life*, through the wrestling, the obeying, the struggling, that biblical teachings demonstrate redemption.

Embrace the mysteries of Scripture

The unexplainable is just that – unexplainable. We should willingly be inarticulate in the face of life's mysteries. These mysteries remain so *precisely* because God refuses to be confined by our explanations. This should not frighten us, rather it should enliven our conversations with others. Let mystery stand. God ceases to be God when confined by language and constructs of creation.

Use biblical biography to highlight the raw humanity contained in Scripture.

The biblical text is filled with humanity: complex and tawdry, joyous and inspiring, ugly and unifying, filled with stories of the unexpected surprisingly transformed by the touch of the Divine.

Go and tell the Christmas story,

Ron

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