



Daring Greatly Blogs - 2015-2016

This is a blog where, each month, two invited people contributed on how the Presidential theme connects with either **mission**, or **spirituality** or **women**.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCING DARING GREATLY - 3 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION ... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL..... - 6 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL - 8 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY ... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX - 10 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX. - 12 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS - 14 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS - 20 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX. - 23 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX..... - 26 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS..... - 29 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS..... - 31 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY ... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL - 33 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY ... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL - 35 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX..... - 38 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX..... - 40 -

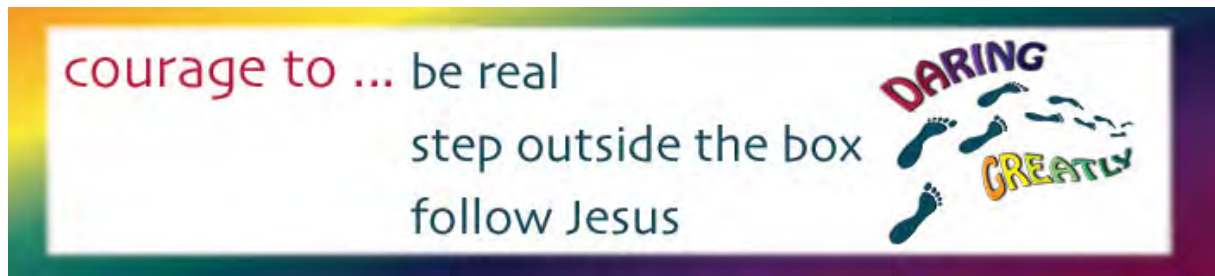
DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS - 42 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS..... - 45 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL..... - 47 -

DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL..... - 50 -

DARING GREATLY... THE FINAL BLOG - 52 -



INTRODUCING DARING GREATLY

'Vulnerability is not weakness.

... and the uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional.

Our only choice is a question of engagement.'

So says Brené Brown in the preface to her book 'Daring Greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent and lead.'¹

In March 2013 I watched the TED talk (Technology, Entertainment & Design) she had given on Vulnerability, and subsequently read her book. The conclusions from her research made a strong impression on me and influenced the theme I have chosen for my Presidential year. It is:

'Daring Greatly:

the courage to be real;

the courage to step outside the box;

the courage to follow Jesus.'

Three challenges bound up in a larger challenge. All requiring courage. To have courage, to show courage, is what happens when you don't allow your fear, or your circumstances, to stop you doing something you know is important. It actually took me quite a bit of courage to tell people this was what I had decided as my theme. I was afraid of what they might say.

By the time someone said to me ... 'Daring Greatly?? ... Sounds like a Cotswold village!' I had fortunately become strong enough to realise that somehow, this was what God wanted me to run with, and that should be good enough for me ... and I could chuckle with the person who ... no, be honest here ... I chuckled ... after the shock that someone wasn't taking me seriously!!

Brené herself asks the question - 'What does it mean to dare greatly?'

The answer?

'We must dare to show up and let ourselves be seen.'

¹ Brown, Brené, 2012, Daring Greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent and lead, Portfolio Penguin, 2

For the first few months after I had been voted in as Vice President, (and recognise I've had two years to think about this!) I thought my theme was going to be something along the lines of 'Unlocking the Pioneering Spirit'. I do believe that dormant in many of us there is a seed of longing to be different and to do differently. It tied in with my pioneering background leading a group in a new, experimental form of being church.

But a bigger, more encompassing picture emerged. I came to see, that if we truly want to be people for whom that last strap line is true - that of following Jesus - as individuals, and as churches, and as a union, we are in need of courage. Courage to look fearlessly and honestly - at who we are, how we are being church and how we are living.

Recently in his daily meditations Richard Rohr was engaging with Paul's teaching on weakness and strength. He writes about the importance of coming to God '**not by being strong, but by being weak; not by being right, but through your mistakes; not by self-admiration but by self-forgetfulness.**'²

He adds 'this teaching utterly levels the playing field of holiness, so all losers can win - which is everybody if we are honest. This is pure Gospel, and worthy of being called 'good news of all the people'. (Luke 2.10)

Another favourite author of mine, Nadia Bolz-Weber wrote about the importance of truth - "There's a popular misconception that Christianity is about knowing the difference between good and evil so that we can choose the good. But **being good has never set me free the way truth has ...**"

She suggests that it is really easy to substitute being good for truth. And that we often run from the truth, do anything to avoid it because we're scared of being crushed by it ... she goes onto say "The truth **does** crush us, but the instant it crushes us, it somehow puts us back together into something honest. It's death and resurrection every time it happens."³

I believe that God offers us all new horizons, new possibilities, an adventure with him, yet it's all too easy to remain safe with our small comfort zones. Constraints of various sorts hem us in and hold us back. But they can be challenged broken, even. Too seldom do we critique - note the word, it's not criticise - how we are living and worshipping.

Critique should be an honest, and a spiritual, reflection on what is happening - be it in your personal life, in your family, your work, your relationships, and in your faith journey. It includes those who travel alongside you - your church, your spiritual community. It means asking question - Where is God in this? in my life? is this working? is this relevant? why are we doing this? not doing that? what would change if I did this, that? Who am I really and who is God?

² Richard Rohr - daily meditations by email. April 14th 2015

³ Bolz-Weber, Nadia, 2013, Cranky, Beautiful Faith, Canterbury Press, 73-4.

So ... my aim this year is to **en**-courage people to, with God, look honestly and seriously at their lives. To listen, critique and have the courage to take new steps ... that's all! **'That's all'?** Well, it's actually a big deal, a challenge which could be deep and life altering - but with the potential to be liberating and life-giving. I have had some experiences like that myself, but like you, I'm still on the journey. Besides, ever since I disclosed this theme, it has come back to bite me, as people have said when I have demurred about doing this or that **'Ah yes, but what about 'daring greatly' then?'** And so, **en**-couraged, I step forward

Jenni



courage to ... be real

step outside the box
follow Jesus



DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION ... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL

Howard Jones writes:

I was chatting with a friend on the phone this morning and he mentioned that he'd been watching *Pleasantville*. If you haven't seen it, the film is about two teenagers who are magically transported into the pleasant, 'Honey I'm home!' world of a 1950's US sitcom where everything is 'perfect' and no real human feelings ever impinge on the sanitised 'perfection'. As the film develops, reality starts to break in to the delight of some and dismay of others. Seems an excellent place to start thinking about the courage to be real.

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY 'REAL'?

In the contemporary Christian world 'real' and 'unreal' are sometimes used as code-words by which we validate or judge ministries. Their perceived 'authenticity' usually means closeness to / distance from poverty and struggle. I've seen Christians play out a kind of churchy version of that Monty Python sketch where the four Yorkshiremen try to outdo each other about how tough their childhood was: "Seventeen of us lived in a paper bag in a septic tank!" ... "Of course, we 'ad it tough ..."

I understand that urge. Six years ago I moved from Solihull to Stoke, from an affluent area to a poor one and there's a very strong desire to authenticate myself by how poor our area is. But maybe the first bit of courage needed to be real about mission is to stop playing the 'My-ward's-worse-than-yours' game. Let's be honest, mission is difficult everywhere!

Of course we have all the stuff you'd expect: drugs, unemployment, crime, litter and mental illness. Broken-down houses, children who don't know what a vegetable is, and the general air of being unseen and unheard that makes young people so open to radicalisation. They're here – of course they're here ... these things are very real! **But they are not the only reality.**

It's vital to see that grime and grimness are not the only things that are real. Beauty is real too. So are love, joy, hope and friendship. In fact these things are more real because they come from the heart of God. And heaven? Heaven is actually the **ultimate** reality (unless you type it into Google images in which case you enter a ghastly world of kitsch weirdness! ... "Hi, I'm Jesus and I'll be your tour guide today.") Unless we believed that why would we ever pray that it be on earth as it is in heaven?

And more importantly still, there is beauty to be found here too. The urban landscape has its own beauty too if you just open your eyes and look. Part of our role in being here is to see it and help others to see it too. Jesus said: *“Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth ... You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world.”* (Mt 5:13-14 Msg)

WHAT DO YOU TELL THOSE WHO SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR MISSION?

I have a group of people and a couple of churches who support us prayerfully and financially. I am so very grateful for them. But I feel an obligation to ‘deliver’ stories of lives and communities being radically changed, stories that sound like the New Testament. The reality is often far more prosaic, and part of the courage to be real about mission is owning the truth that it’s rarely like it is in the Christian paperbacks. You have to be real and that means being honest about the joys, the sorrows and also the sheer humdrum.

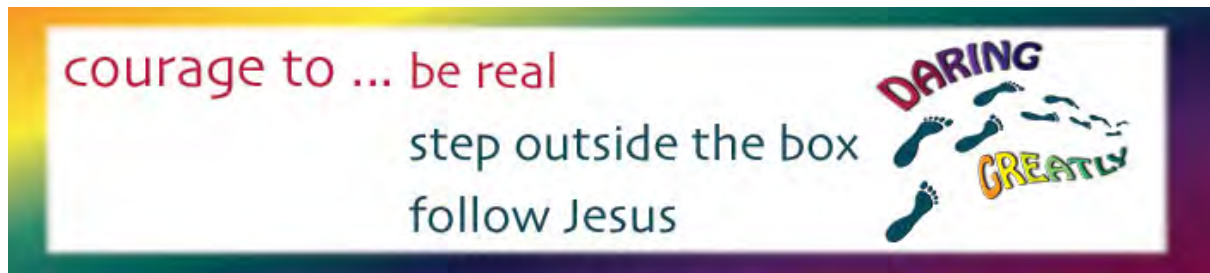
After years of working, relating, praying, setting up projects and events, to our joy a little church has evolved. We always meet around a meal and share communion, but the rest is pretty fluid. We share stories of Jesus, and talk about real life with a mixed bag of local people who really would never go to church except for a funeral. It’s always messy but also deeply joyful and affirming.

But hand in hand with that joy goes deep frustration. Real change often seems so elusive: is it even on their agenda at all? They can be so lovely one week and then turn on you and yell abuse down the phone the next. Things that seem like 'no-brainers' to us floor them completely. Is this really church? Are we doing any good at all? These are the questions that eat at you in the small hours. There’s a saying: **There is a Saviour and it’s NOT YOU!** I think the courage to be real about mission means knowing both how much and how little you are needed, and learning to be content with that.



Howard Jones has been a Baptist minister since 1988; previous to that he was a musician and music teacher. Howard is married to Iona and spent the first 21 years of his ministry serving two churches, one in the Cotswolds and then in Solihull. In 2009 Howard left mainstream ministry to become a team leader in Urban Expression Cobridge (UEC), a small missional community working particularly with people who have little or no connection to church life. UEC works in partnership with a number of community based

organisations and churches and has organised many community-building initiatives with toddlers, young people, elders and local individuals and a small gathering is now developing, based in Howard and Iona’s home. Howard loves to cook and appeared in the 2015 series of *Masterchef*. He spends a fair proportion of his time now leading small classes in community venues to help people grow in confidence to cook healthily and on a budget. Howard has two grown up daughters. Alongside his commitment to his family and the UEC team, he also loves music and movies.



DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL

Simon Hall writes:

I have a really vivid memory of sitting in a coffee bar with two members of our church who were telling me why they were leaving ('What a strange way to start a blog post about mission,' I hear you say).

"We can't respect you", they said. "You're just like us. We need someone to look up to, someone who's better than us, so we can have hope that we can be better people one day." The minister of the church they now attend is a friend who once told me that he hides his true personality because he thinks pretending to be a more dominant male will make his church grow. Sounds like he might be right!

When I recall this moment (it was a one-off, I'm not THAT bad...), I also remember my study of psychology of religion at university and a fascinating case of a researcher who spent three years at a large church in the US, getting to know people as she pretended to be just another member of the community. (Yes, I know, I don't think you'd get that through an ethics board nowadays). At the end of her study, her most startling discovery was this: that the vast majority (I'm pretty sure it was 80%+) of the women she befriended admitted to a life-controlling problem that they had never shared with anyone in the church before. The main reason – everyone else looked so happy, healthy and successful, how could they admit to their own brokenness?

Admitting to brokenness doesn't seem to be a problem for our brothers and sisters in the family of God. From the straightforwardly awful behaviour of so many characters in the Old Testament histories, and the self-lacerating cries of Psalm 51, all the way to less-than-flattering portraits of the earliest disciples, human frailty and failure has been something taken for granted. Why keep it a secret? More recently, a young John Wesley wrote in his diary,

I went to America to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of mischief? I have a fair summer of religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, 'To die is gain!...in a storm I think, 'What if the Gospel be not true?'

Somehow we have lost this ability to be broken in front of each other. It does us no favours when it comes to sharing our faith. Perhaps we believe that presenting our most successful profile will make the Good News more true? A friend of mine and a member of *Revive* told me a story about the first time he told a Christian he was gay. "It's less than God's best", is what he remembers from their conversation. The implication being (in my friend's mind at least) that those of us who are Christian and straight are God's best.

Why do we bother pretending? Better to say with Paul that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Or as my friend Steve, a social worker, once put it: "When I talk to people about sin, they just shut off. But when I say, "I'm full of s*@t, you're full of s*@t, we're all full of s*@t!" they get that."

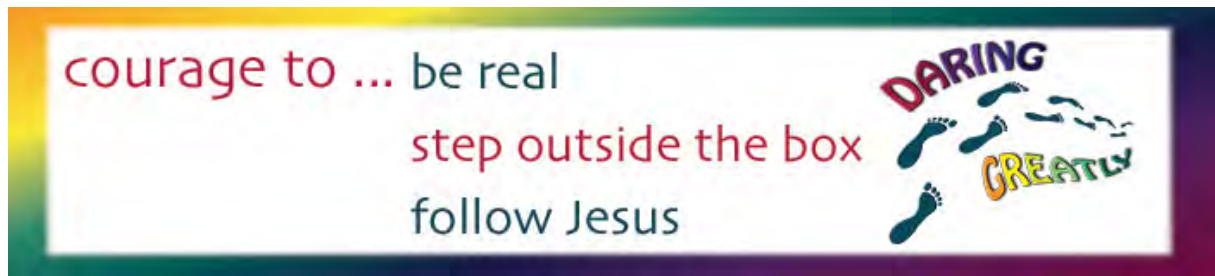
One of the most consistent criticisms of Christians in this country is that we are judgmental and think we are better than other people – could our desire to look as if we have it all sorted out actually be a hindrance to the gospel? Not the only hindrance, but perhaps one that needs to be addressed. How might we do that?

I have a one word answer: community. Jesus not only formed a community of disciples around him, he taught them that the love they showed each other would be the primary mark of their discipleship (John 13:35). Genuine community is rapidly becoming a rare commodity, as more people relate to the world through screens, something which is both a challenge and an opportunity for the church. If our churches can be 'places of availability and vulnerability' (as The Northumbria Community put it), we can offer people a place where they can experience genuine transforming love in the community of God's people. I say transforming because even as I promote openness about the clay pots that we are, I believe that the treasure we carry does indeed bring growth and change that reflects the glory of God. And I believe that the church is the place that fosters the healing that we need.

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman suggests that community is now a ghost that we resurrect at festivals, only to return to our isolated lives when the weekend is over. Sometimes I feel that the church can be that too – a couple of hours with God and God's family, then back to our privatised lives. I trust that we can do better, and for God's sake and with God's help we will.



Simon Hall is a Baptist Minister living in Leeds with his wife Anna, a TV documentarian, and their three teenage children. 22 years ago he started a youth congregation called *revive*, and is still one of its Ministers. He is also co-Minister of Chapel Allerton Baptist Church. He is something of a compulsive starter-upper, having shared in founding an arts centre, an HE college, a youth work charity and a few churches. He enjoys music, movies, books and video games and very occasionally enjoys Leeds United.



DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY ... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX

Judy Howard writes:

I'm swimming. Coming here is to go down into the Jordan, to be immersed in the deep waters of God's self. I am baptised again and again. It is acceptance, forgiveness, release, renewal. Such blessing. As I swim I think about this title – 'Spirituality: the courage to step outside the box'.

What is the box?

I imagine a wooden planter or window box.

Some plants grow straight up and tidy, and usually in the middle;
some, near the edges, tumble over obscuring those edges.

What is the box?

Is it big enough to hold the earth of tradition and discipline and practice?

Will my roots go deep enough to find nourishment and stability?

Will I stretch wide enough to allow my foliage to tumble over the edges?

Once upon a time I sat in a prayer meeting at college. I had learned the language, the 'ritual', the expectation, becoming a proficient club member, definitely inside a particular box. Rising to the dizzy heights of being president of the Christian Union I wondered whether the others would discover that I was a fake since I never converted people on the train.

I sit with my friend in the little Jamaican cafe. Ivy brings us goat curry, rice and peas, and dumplings. I hold a dumpling, break it and we share it. An Emmaus moment. Christ hosts the space in time and place in the breaking of bread.

I have been invited to share the Christmas feast with my Egyptian co-granny. She is a devout Copt. Our grandchildren, her sons, and my daughter are there, and she has also invited another Egyptian couple. They are Muslim.

When the meal is over, and the younger ones have left, co-granny, her friends and I talk, share memories, and eat delicious cakes from Alexandria. The conversation drifts from English to Arabic. The other woman gets a scarf out of her bag, puts it round her head, takes her shoes off and sets herself ready to pray beside the television. Her husband is given a table cloth, to be his prayer mat,

and goes upstairs to make a holy space. Co-granny clears the dining table, moving around her praying friend. Prompted by this prayer I sit and allow phrases from the psalms to pray me. Such hospitality; 'free to worship without fear' says the Benedictus. Prayers are over. We sit talking for a while. I get up to leave and in that moment co-granny invites me to pray for us, Christian and Muslim and me a woman.

Who has been the host of this feast, this space in time and place, this profound, natural shared holiness?

It is an evening in May. I have been invited to speak to a group who are studying a course in Spiritual Journeys. The person running the course has sometimes attended a gathering where I celebrate communion once a month. She has asked me to share my journey of faith. She has also asked whether I would be willing to share Communion with the participants on the course and if so, would there be qualifications to receiving communion?

She is eager for the group to share the experience that has been profound for her. How could there be excluding criteria for the nourishment of a life given freely by God?

Sixteen of us gather in a little wooden building, (maybe another sort of box!), on stilts on the edge of a valley. The group leader welcomes, introduces, and then asks each person to tell something of the spiritual path they are on, if any, and also what experience of Communion they might have had. All but one tell stories of belonging to main stream churches; Sunday school, choir, confirmation, or joining as young adults for some years. Then disillusionment. One woman speaks of the 'gap' that grew between her and what went on at the front of church as getting bigger and bigger until she dropped off the edge.

It's my turn. I tell stories of my faith journey. Then I spread a cloth on the floor in front of me; place home made bread and a cup of wine on it. I use words from a simple contemporary liturgy. This action, blessing, breaking, sharing, is so powerful it hardly needs words.

Holiness fills the space around us and within us.

We pass the bread and the wine around the circle, each giving, each receiving. There is profound silence.

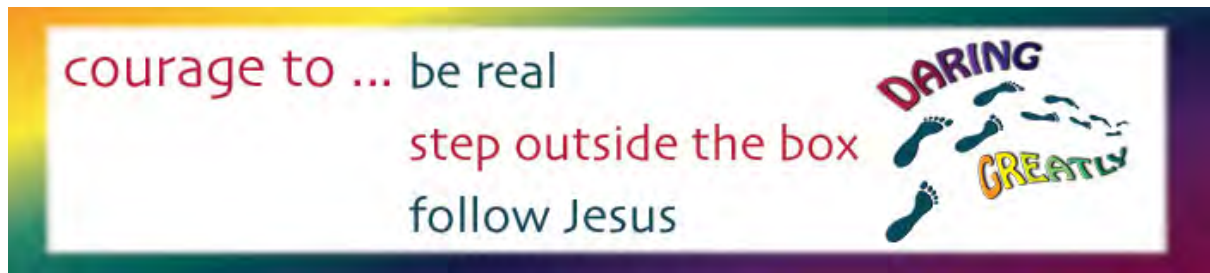
Then people speak of what it has meant to them. Some weep.

The one person who has had no previous experience of participating in Communion and had always seen it as a primitive, cannibalistic activity, says, with tears in her eyes, how deeply meaningful it has been. She could not have imagined the experience of such loving acceptance.

Another Emmaus time, another Emmaus place.

What relief to realise that God does not need defending. How absurd!

The things of God cannot belong in any box. All our boxes belong in God.



DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX

Rupert Lazar writes:

Imagine with me a people vibrant in their worship; passionate in their love for our Lord Jesus; enthusiastic in their service and confident in the Word of God! Impossible or asking too much? I don't think so! That for me, my friends, I believe is how God intended his church to be.

Lately, I have been reflecting on the apostle Paul's words to Timothy reminding him of the fact that God had given him a gift for the building of the church and that he was to keep it alive. So in 2 Tim.1:6-7 we read "...I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline". Elsewhere, in fact in his letter to the church in Corinth the same apostle makes it clear that God give all Christians gifts for the building up of the church, the body of Christ (12:4ff).

I have to admit that I am concerned that too many of us Christians (may I say Baptists?) have become too fearful, indeed too timid. We feel powerless to make a change; we act too unloving and skirt around discipline whether it is self or otherwise. And yet Paul is clear that God's gifts are given that we may be strong, loving and self-controlled!

As I think outside of the box, I wonder if our President is not being prophetic in calling us to dare greatly and recapture the truth of who God has declared us to be. God has called us to himself, he has invested of himself in us and His Spirit merges with our spirit making us a new creation. God through his Spirit has given us gifts that we may carry out our assignment as Christians to be a blessing to all people – a covenant first made with Abram (Genesis 12) and which was renewed in Jesus Christ who went around blessing all who came to him, ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Friends, the more I think of it the more I become convinced that we are not sufficiently vibrant, or passionate or enthusiastic or confident because we either have a distorted understanding or we have lost all understanding of our identity in Christ. I wonder if we have become so much a people of the Word that we have lost the fact that God always intended us to equally be a people of the Spirit.

Christian friend, you are a child of God, you belong to his family and you are made in his image! We

are adopted into this family and our brother Jesus has shown us how to live by faith, in the power of the Spirit, to please the Father. Furthermore, Jesus said that all that he did we could do too – hear again his words as recorded for us in Scripture, John 14:12, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”. Then Jesus went on to talk about sending the Holy Spirit!

Jesus is the example and we follow him. I ask you, who is more vibrant; who is more passionate; who is more enthusiastic and who is more confident than Jesus?! For me it is entirely possible to be so much more than we currently are when we truly embrace the truth of who God has made us to be and declared us to be.

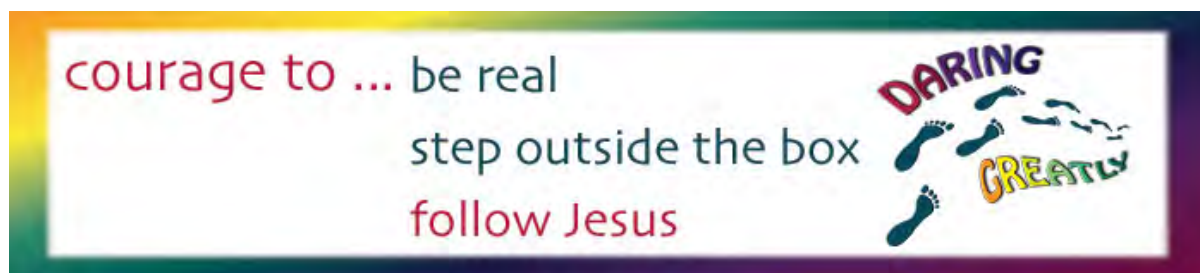
Christians, it is time to stop being afraid. It is time to stand firmly and confidently upon God’s word. It is time to push through our traditional stiff upper lip and express ourselves in vibrant worship as so often our beloved Psalms call us to do. It is time to express our love in active service for love un-expressed is not love. Scripture is clear that God so loved that he gave his Son – love expressed in action! It is time to be a people of Word and Spirit with the Spirit guiding us and producing his fruit in us.

Our churches are to be places where the gifts of the Spirit which we all have, are used for “the common good” (1Cor.12:7). And wherever we go we are to be means of blessing, remembering that we carry God’s Spirit who works with and on our spirit so that we are no longer timid but powerful, loving and self-controlled.

Now tell me, am I thinking out of the box or just reminding us of who God made us to be? Sisters, brothers, let’s go for it – I dare you!



Rupert Lazar is minister of East Barnet Baptist Church and Vice-President of our Baptist Union



DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS

Laura Gill writes:

About 15 years ago I stumbled on the work of Marshall Rosenberg⁴, a social change activist whose gift to the world is the process I now know and share as Nonviolent Communication (NVC)⁵. Rosenberg died, peacefully, in the spring of this year and I guess the knowledge that I've yet to put pen to paper in celebration of his life is lingering as I begin reflecting on when and how I summon the courage to follow Jesus. The Jesus of liberation theology, of radical love, boundary-breaking and disruption, the Jesus of New Testament record and Old Testament prophecies, sits, alongside Ghandi and Martin Luther King, as a key figure in the practice of nonviolence. A political, social and personal pathway for which courage, as well as compassion, is a prerequisite.

Nonviolence is a tricky word to stick in the title of your organisation. Like others, I was nervous of it before understanding it fully, and am increasingly reluctant to let it go as I begin to understand the potential beauty this approach to life represents. Courage and compassion, whether directed internally or externally, sit at its core.

Many of us carry a longing for a world where everyone's needs matter and the planet is cared for. We're not quite sure how it will materialise this side of heaven but sense that the courage to follow Jesus is likely part of it. The capacity to even be able to envision this other reality is no small task, given the thought and survival practices our language patterns and probable education habituate in us. To be able to hold that vision regardless of our circumstances (think Paul, think Esther, think Christ), and then to approach the task of creating it with love, is deeply counter-cultural. As my fellow NVC trainer Miki Kashtan writes of our place in humanity's history, "We live in a time when vision is almost gone, love is absent from many of our interactions, and we have accepted a worldview that says that the only possible change is within individuals...the challenge is immense: all of us [as social change activists] are collectively bootstrapping ourselves and only partially emerging from our current paradigms. If we want to create institutions that truly embody a transformed consciousness, our way of working for change is as important as the change we want to create."⁶

⁴ <http://www.cnvc.org/about/marshall-rosenberg.html>

⁵ <http://sharedspace.org.uk/>

⁶ Kashtan, Miki, 2015, *Reweaving Our Human Fabric*, Fearless Heart Publications, 9

Back to Jesus. The Jesus way. The narrow road. The method being as crucial as the message. The resistance of alternative routes to power offered so potently over forty days of weakness and isolation in the desert, and beyond. The articulator of unfamiliar and unexpected messages. The voice of the margins. The prophet. The most inspiring person in town. The social outcast. The way we follow Jesus, as individuals and as church in these days, as always, is going to communicate as much about what we believe and hold most precious, as anything we advocate, accomplish or fail at.

Michael Nagler⁷ contends that the 'how to' of 'moving forward with civil resistance (civil both in terms of coming from the citizenry (-us) and being 'civil' or nonviolent (read non-judgemental, compassionate, Christ-like), to the ever-deepening oppression and erosion of democracy, how to replace the culture of alienation surrounding us with one of humanity and belonging – is the challenge of our time.' I tend to agree.

I'm currently co-leading an initiative bringing global and local foci to BMS' work in the face of gender based violence⁸ and reviewing our creation care agenda⁹ ahead of the COP Paris summit in December. Without a grounding in NVC the approach we've taken in Dignity would inevitably have been other. In some of the worst imaginable scenarios it could have heightened resistance, judgement, pain, anger, division, defensiveness and retaliation. As I reflect on the approaching realities of climate chaos engendered by global warming, alongside many other violent attitudes and practices, I find myself asking how, in a world where the prevailing mind-sets are scarcity, blame and separation, can we support ourselves and respond to the responsibilities with which we have been entrusted? How, as followers of Christ, and with all the neighbours who share our planet, can we avert potential collapse and forge a future —for this and future generations — that sustains life, our own and that of others who share the biosphere with us?

Jesus, through his life and his word, outlines constructive, albeit radical, strategies for a world that works for all. The big picture guidance is to generate, nurture and sustain an intention – of huge resilience for it will be tested time and again – of loving our global neighbours and our 'enemies' as ourselves. In the frame of creation care, we will require leaders and communities who help us adjust to a world (we choose to willingly construct) where some of the ways we currently experience freedom are curtailed. Where we make imaginative efforts to understand why progress, at least in the West, now depends upon the exercise of fewer opportunities than we have become habituated to – many times at the expense of others.¹⁰

Much has, rightly, been made of the pope's recent encyclical. Amidst the inevitable headlines, I valued Stephen White's blog for Vox pointing out that the pope's views on climate change are not

⁷ Michael Nagler co-founded the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme at UC, Berkeley and is the founder for the Metta Centre for Nonviolence.

⁸ <http://bmsworldmission.org/dignity>

⁹ <http://bmsworldmission.org/futureshape>

¹⁰ More of this kind of thinking is energetically supplied by George Monbiot, in *Heat*, 2006, 2007 Penguin Books, 187-8 and throughout.

what makes this a radical document. Rather, it is Pope Francis' understanding of the ecological crisis as a symptom of our deeper human crisis. The two problems are related and interdependent. 'And the solution is not simply to eliminate fossil fuels or rethink carbon credits. The pope is calling on the world to rediscover what it means to be human — and as a result to reject the cult of economic growth... [to recognise that] a willingness to exploit creation is deeply connected to a willingness to exploit human beings.'¹¹

All of which leads me to a position where I'm left daring to follow Jesus in a world which needs a new approach to power and a workable model of non-coercive leadership, decision-making and resource allocation. How to respond?

Constructive alternatives – and the ability to begin and sustain dialogue in order to co-create them – are vital. Dialogue and constructive programmes are two of the three pillars of a nonviolent approach to social change. The third element – one which Jesus models in spades – is the ability to be in relationship to power, our own and other people's. This is especially so when there is the potential for power (inherently a 'positive' need rather than a 'negative' force) to be used in ways which oppress others. Nonviolent resistance (and here the filmmakers have helped our inspirations hugely through the demonstrative storytelling of Ghandi, Selma and the like) is about being able to stand up, with integrity, to those with power who are not ready to dialogue, despite genuine attempts to engage them, and 'who contribute, by the very business-as-usual daily decisions that they make, to the ongoing massive destruction of our times.'¹²

And the requirement to walk a path of resistance, when creativity offers no other way, is one of the reasons why the term 'nonviolence' rather than purely 'compassion' has become totemic in my attempts to follow Jesus. The two words cannot always substitute for each other, though they are happy conspirators. For me and for the line of nonviolent activists I draw inspiration from, including I believe Jesus Christ, nonviolence also includes elements of courage and truth. Rosenberg has said that Nonviolent Communication emerged from his efforts to understand love. Compassion is fundamental. However, alone it doesn't capture the intensity and rigour of the inner work (continual transformation/accountability/soul-care) which is needed to keep standing for what we passionately believe in even while maintaining a loving attitude.

Increasingly, I understand love and compassion as a commitment to act in ways that honour everyone's humanity. That means caring for the other person even when we are on opposing 'sides', even when all that I hold dear is at stake. And needless to say, the close proximity of this intention with the commandments to love 'your enemy' and 'your neighbour as yourself' are vital in ensuring a nonviolent pathway, and all that entails, is congruent with following Jesus.

My lived experience is that fear doesn't go away as the practice of nonviolence deepens. What changes is the ability to bear it, and still have courage. The courage to follow Jesus and find a way of

¹¹ Stephen P White is a fellow of the Catholic studies programme at the Ethics and Public Policy Centre in Washington DC. His vox.com blog appeared on 24 June 2015.

¹² Kashtan, Miki, 2015, *Reweaving Our Human Fabric*, Fearless Heart Publications, 19

reaching for his radical love. (With enough practice and commitment, acting based on fear becomes less and less tempting.) Jenni wrote in the first blog of this series that courage is what happens when you don't allow your fear, or your circumstances to stop you doing something you know is important. For me this is intrinsically linked to integrity – the meeting place of our inner and outer lives. Although I'm not wild about all his work, I like Mark Nepo's insight that 'the health of our integrity often determines our inner strength and resilience in meeting the outer world.'¹³

As an introvert and a recovering perfectionist, who throughout education and employment has suffered a series of painful disappointments with many of the authority figures who crossed my path, ahead of exploring nonviolence I certainly had a survival script not too dissimilar to the one Brené Brown admits to: 'Keep everyone at a safe distance and always have an exit strategy.'¹⁴ Increasingly I find the rigor and support of the NVC process, alongside and within the other resources of my spiritual life, provides a framework for me to live out a courageous intention. It supports me to transcend and transform fear and judgement, and grasp the beauty of human needs as the frame which will provide me with the clearest and most life-giving understanding of why people (me/you) do what we do. All of which opens the door to connection, which, in an age of fear and separation, brings hope.

Strategies for accountability, self-care, stilling the mind, addressing rather than repressing vulnerabilities, fears and trauma, be they NVC, mindfulness, a particular school of spirituality, or some combination of all of the above, seem to me vital in this beautiful, fast-moving, pain-ridden and pain suppressing, fragmented, howling and entertaining world. 'How can I be in healthy relationship with you, if I'm not in healthy relationship with myself? How can I be intimate with you if I'm not intimate with myself'.¹⁵

Living by these principles means I can, for much of the time, gain empathic access to the longings, dreams and values that inform our reactions to one another. In terms of dialogue and decision-making that demands continually reaching for, and believing in, solutions that maintain everyone's dignity. Even when we may want an outcome from the bottom of our hearts, the deep practice of NVC involves 'an active unwillingness to accept a solution that would be at the expense of others, including and especially when the use of protective force is introduced as a last resort'.¹⁶

With this some depth and integrity practice begins to be put in place for approaching Jesus' other command to go beyond normative love: '*If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.*' Matt 5:46-47 (NLT).

This is one of the areas where I have appreciated the possibilities of NVC most. It's those I give the

¹³ Nepo, Mark, 2005, *The Exquisite Risk*, Three Rivers Press, 11

¹⁴ Brown Brené, 2012, *Daring Greatly*, Penguin

¹⁵ Peter Scazzero, 2013/10, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 208 – a quote offered by Jenni Entrican in relation to 'the courage to be real' aspect of *Daring Greatly*

¹⁶ Kashtan, Miki, 2015, *Reweaving Our Human Fabric*, Fearless Heart Publications, 42

'enemy' label to on a local/global level who are most likely to trigger me into my own pain and fear, and produce reactions (audible or otherwise) which tip me into violence of thought, speech or action, and away from love. Away, that is, from following Jesus as he tells me he wants me to. I need more than a longing to be better. More than a voice in my head (or outside it!) saying "you should (insert commandment, norm or advice of choice)."

One of the books Jenni is nudging us towards over her presidential year is Eugene's Peterson's *Practice Resurrection*. In the tiny fragment I've had sight of so far, she offers Peterson's encouragement to submit ourselves to the blessing that God's seeking for us, as part of a spiritual practice that will build the courage to follow Jesus. '...We saturate our minds and memories in Christ and the scriptures, and then go about our day's work without a prepared script...' There is a release and terror in that recommendation that individual personalities will feel differently. Living a practice of what we do not originate and cannot anticipate, as they encourage us to, is not for the faint-hearted, and yet is also a place of deep rest.

As we contemplate the possibility of submitting ourselves to blessing in this way, 'Love thy neighbour as *thyself*' resonates in a broader light, essential for its actualisation and sustainability. Saturating ourselves in Christ involves retreat (physical or mental), following Jesus to the quiet places he went, (Luke 5:16) to pray:

*Come, occupy my silent place
And make Thy dwelling there.
More grace is wrought in quietness
Than any is aware.*

John Oxenham

'You don't realise it yet, but the preaching of the gospel emanates from the poustinia¹⁷, creates a unity with God, then causes a confrontation with the world.'

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Poustinia

The confrontation with the world, from a place of inner resource, and with an attitude of nonviolence, as modelled so radically by Christ, is increasingly where it's at with me. My path seems to be that of an introvert activist – and that involves daring, greatly.

I wonder, with my friend Miki, 'Can we find enough love and skill to do the work, to do the loving towards and on behalf of those who don't have access to their love? Can a sufficient number of us develop enough capacity and skills to stand tall in the midst of distrust, judgement and even violence from others¹⁸ and maintain our stance of love, as Jesus did? For I believe this is what following him means.

To return again to Jenni's opening blog, daring greatly brings challenges which are deep and life-

¹⁷ A silent place for prayer

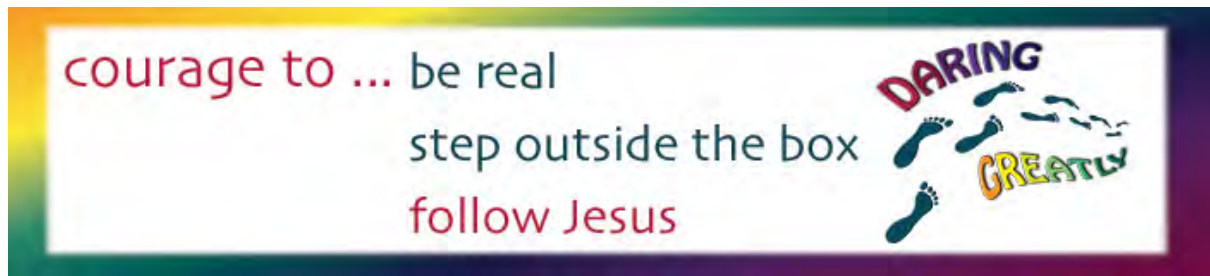
¹⁸ Kashtan, Miki, 2015, *Reweaving Our Human Fabric*, Fearless Heart Publications, 30

altering – but that have the potential to be liberating and life-giving. That’s certainly been my experience as I’ve lived and worked with the NVC process as a strategy and a support for modelling, wrestling with and daring to emulate Jesus’ radical love – for me and for everyone else.

I am glad of this year to focus our attention on how we follow Jesus as we feel out the contours of the transition that is in front of us, on shaping our shared future on this planet, and on the courage a choice of radical love truly demands.



Laura Gill is Mission Resources Coordinator for BMS World Mission and a certified trainer with the Centre for Nonviolent Communication. She has worked in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Brazil and has over twenty years’ experience in UK arts and NGO sectors, as a facilitator, writer and teacher in many different settings. In 2003 she ran the first NVC training in Cambodia. She is currently working on BMS’ Dignity initiative to encourage people to take a stand against gender based violence in the UK and beyond.



DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS

Steve Holmes writes:

In the past week I've both heard a woman - Miriam Swaffield - preach the best sermon I've heard this year, and happened to talk with several female friends who each spoke of the ways - often brutal - in which people have tried to prevent them from preaching.

One mentioned that when she was young she had found courage and inspiration from reading about Huldah¹⁹, the (female) prophet whom King Josiah consulted when he rediscovered the Book of the Law (2Ki 22:3-20). Josiah could have gone to some reasonably capable male prophets; Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah were all alive and active at the time, according to Scripture. He went to Huldah.

My friends' stories about being mocked and silenced when they sought to preach put me in mind of 'Jeremiah's Complaint' in Jer 20:7ff; I tried to imagine how Huldah might have described her own 'daring greatly', her struggles to find the courage to follow God.

Huldah's Complaint (after Jer 20:7-18)

Burning.
Blood boiling.
Bones roasting.
How can unsaid words be so
Incendiary?

You fooled me God.
Seduced me and subdued me when
I saw your splendour
Blazing bright. When
An ember from your altar
Blistered my lips. When
You kindled a spark

¹⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huldah>

Within me. When
You said "Speak!"

Were you laughing then, God?
They are now.
Barbs fly; fists too.
Vitriol and violence drive me to
Silence.

To hear you speak is
Not enough to speak you.
To have your Word is
Not enough to preach you.
Beards and balls matter more.

An inferno in my marrow
Too ardent to be silent
The battle exhausts me
I cannot
Not
Speak.

They wait to pounce.
To denounce.
Their smouldering anger mounts.
"She speaks - and she's a she!
"Seduce her or subdue her
"Shame her into silence!"

God of the angel armies,
They say you try the righteous
Test by fire.
I have committed my cause unto you;
Will I see bright
Vindication?

I see a day
A woman believing your word
A child born, a
Son who
Came forth from the
Womb for toil
And sorrow

And shame
I see a vacant
Tomb. I see
Women you tell
To tell.

I see your promise, God
Blazing tongues poured out
All flesh flame-baptised
Slaves, men and maids,
Fire-filled indifferently.

When the fire comes
And the daughters and sons
Will prophesy there
Will they then hear from her?

Or must she wait till fire falls once more?



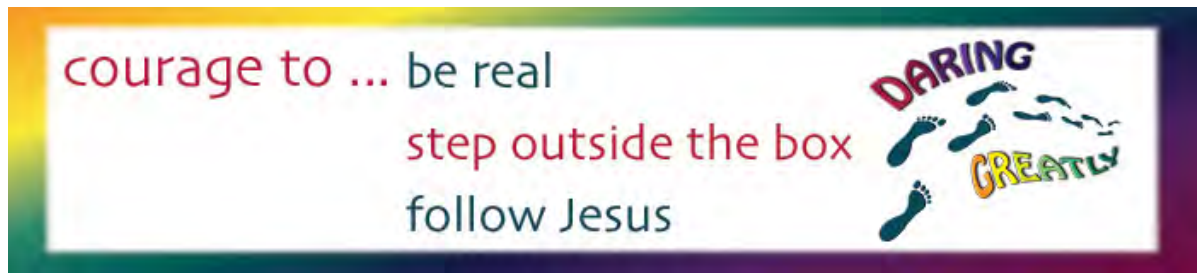
Steve Holmes is a Baptist minister, presently employed as Senior Lecturer in Theology at the University of St Andrews. He is author or editor of several books and speaks regularly at ministers' meetings and Christian festivals. He is a trustee of the Evangelical Alliance and of the Sophia Network. He blogs somewhat sporadically at steverholmes.org.uk/blog.

Comments

I love this! I met Jenni today when she preached at our church. She suggested I read your blog entry in relation to my experiences whilst working for the Anglican church in community development. Someone told me that having the gift of prophecy and exposing the truth can be incredibly hard, and as a woman, I have found it has added to the challenge.

love in Christ

Emma



DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX

Joshua Searle writes:

One of the main themes of this blog series on 'Daring Greatly' is 'the courage to be real'. It takes courage to accept that some of the old ways of being and doing church are no longer relating to the emerging culture in which we live. If we are to be faithful to the gospel and relevant to culture, we need not just a new vision for evangelistic 'outreach', but a radical integration of spirituality and missional practice that will require great courage – the courage to be real, to think out of the box, and to follow Christ's call to a life of radical discipleship.

For too long many have assumed that spirituality is a matter of an individual's 'personal relationship with Jesus'. This limited understanding of spirituality has little connection to the gospel imperative to make the Kingdom of God a visible reality in every aspect of life. The integrity of our witness to the kingdom of God requires a full integration of spirituality and mission and the courage to embrace a life of costly discipleship.

Given the persecuting zeal of some fundamentalist Christians today, it often takes courage to say that being a Baptist is not about professing sound doctrine or adhering intellectually to a particular creed. I hope that we will be able to envision Baptist identity primarily in terms being a disciple of the risen Lord Jesus.

In the new cultural contexts we now find ourselves in, we need to focus our thinking towards a consideration of the socially-transformative aspects of spiritual formation into Christlikeness. We can begin by asking such questions as: 'What characteristics of Baptist spirituality could enrich and sustain our discipleship and participation in the *missio Dei*?' 'What kind of spirituality could contribute towards the transformation of not only our hearts but also of our homes, streets, neighbourhoods, public institutions and societies?'

I believe that as a British Baptist community living in a post-Christendom context of cultural exile, we now have a great opportunity to return to the simplicity of the gospel and to reflect on what really matters in our faith. We have an opportunity to distinguish between what is genuinely important and what is insignificant, extraneous or transitory. So looking to the future, I hope that Baptists will not dissipate their energies on fruitless speculations concerning the meaning of 'sacraments' or the church's doctrine on homosexuality, but would instead focus on 'God's redemptive plan that

operates by faith' (1 Timothy 1:4).

Being faithful to this plan is not a matter of professing sound doctrine or moral crusading against sin, but is rather about living a life of loving obedience that follows Jesus instinctively with the same reflex as that which causes a bird to sing or the heart to beat. These are all spiritual issues that require a radical, out-of-the-box vision of spiritual renewal that extends beyond the parochial concerns of the church and engages the world in ways that are consistent with the compassion-focused ministry and mission of Jesus.

In particular, we will need to renounce the idolatrous notion of God as a transcendent object 'out there' that guarantees us fulfillment and happiness. Spirituality refers not primarily to the way that we interact with this transcendent idol, but to the way we relate to one another as human beings. Our spirituality can only be authentically Christlike if, instead of rejecting the world, we embrace it fully through acts of compassion in obedience to Jesus.

If mission relates to the Great Commission, then spirituality is based on Christ's Great Commandment. We've often made the mistake of thinking that Jesus' Great Commandment (to love God with heart, mind, soul and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself) refers to two commandments. But, in fact, it's one commandment. We demonstrate that we love God, not by waving our arms around in a worship service but, rather, we love God by loving our brothers and sisters: demonstrating solidarity and compassion not only with the people in our churches, but especially with the people we meet on the street and in our workplaces. If we claim to love the God that we haven't seen while at the same time we don't love the brothers or sisters who we see, the Bible says quite clearly that we're liars and hypocrites (1 John 4).

So if we profess intellectual fidelity to sound doctrine and if we sing songs of praise to 'God', but at the same time we turn our gaze away from a suffering child or if we close our ears to the cries of pain of a suffering brother or sister, then in fact we violate Jesus' Great Commandment and we become like those who say "Lord, Lord", but who don't really know Jesus, and, even more tragically, Jesus doesn't know them (Matthew 7:21-23).

If we want to make the gospel known to our generation, we will need to dare something new in faith. We will need to experiment and find new, creative, counter-cultural, inspiring and innovative ways to advance the Kingdom of God. We can no longer be satisfied with the kind of narrow, individualistic, world-rejecting spirituality, which perpetuates the 'me-and-Jesus' dogma that has left many of our churches so ill-equipped for mission and ministry in our emerging society.

Looking to the future my hope is that the British Baptist community can pioneer a renewed spiritual vision of a 'church without walls' in which the Christian values of honesty, integrity, dignity, freedom, justice and compassion are expressed not only in explicit church activities, but also in the ordinary, mundane realities of everyday life. If we can live according to this vision, then we'll be faithful not only to our nonconformist Baptist heritage, but also, even more importantly, to the gospel itself.



Joshua T Searle is Tutor in Theology and Public Thought and the Assistant Director of Postgraduate Research at Spurgeon's College, London. A Northumbrian by birth and temperament, he is a graduate of Oxford, Dublin and Prague. He has taught theology and philosophy in Germany and Ukraine and is the author of books and articles on millennial studies and the social theology of evangelical Christians. He also serves as Chair of Mission Eurasia UK (a partner of BMS World Mission) and is a visiting professor of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv. He is married to Varduyi.

courage to ... be real
step outside the box
follow Jesus



DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX

Sandra Crawford writes:

DARING TO WALK ALONGSIDE...

I have heard too many stories recently of Christian teenagers who have taken their lives (or attempted to) because they are struggling with their sexuality and think the church, their family and God will reject them. Whatever our theological position on sexuality, if we are leading young people to kill themselves then we are wrong. I make no apologies to those who have heard me say this before, and I will keep on saying it.

20 years ago I stepped into my first full time role as church youth worker in Manchester. I duly fulfilled my own expectations and those of the church and began to head up an all-singing-all-dancing youth and children's programme with the aid of many superb volunteers. However, I became unhappy that our primary aim of youthwork was to deliver cup-a-soup versions of the Gospel (pre-packaged, only takes a few minutes, easy to swallow, and soon forgotten) which ultimately tried to rescue young people from their world into the church. Although hundreds of children and young people came through our doors regularly, there were also many who didn't fit in and left, or were banned due to their behaviour. Those who didn't fit were often those who struggled to find their place in the rest of society too. It struck me that this didn't seem to be the way Jesus did things; he seemed to go out of his way to spend time with those that society rejected. Many of the young people who didn't fit our big youthwork were from broken families, failing in the education system and living with a depth of suffering that many church volunteers were not trained for. They did not need to hear a message which highlighted their brokenness, they were already well aware of that, and a conversion to a middle class gospel and church was irrelevant to them.

Stepping outside the box for me has been stepping out of the big numbers game and deliberately and intentionally working with a few. I'm part of a small church, to enable me to be here and serve as youth specialist minister I have a second ministry role as a regional minister, but my primary calling in both roles is to work with small groups of young people surrounding them with a community of adults. I see my calling as one of walking alongside young people, and encouraging others to do the same, to nurture something that is already placed there by God from the beginning of creation. If we believe we are made in the image of God then each of us is significant, and are

signs and symbols of God himself. I'm trying to encourage small groups of trusted adults to gather around young people, to provide community, security, and a secure base, all of which provide significance. The intention is not to spoon-feed a cup-a-soup gospel or pour in religious knowledge seeking to address the dodgy moral wellbeing of a young person, but rather to spend time exploring, understanding their perspective, their world and demonstrating the gospel within it.

Walking alongside a young person as they struggle with significance, as they consider their sexuality, as they navigate our ridiculous 'one size fits all' education system, is a huge challenge and is often heart-breaking and emotionally draining. To do this well, you can only walk alongside a few.

My heart is to encourage a community of faith; a group of people of all ages and abilities, on a journey of searching, learning, discovering, and owning faith. I have been amazed as I've watched the most unusual relationships strike up between young and old. Bill is in his 70's, an ex-Navy guy who is covered in tattoos from all over the world who has struck up a friendship with a 15 year old lad. The conversations began as they discussed his cool tattoos, and Bill has nurtured that relationship, a grandfather in the faith. Bill would not see himself as a youth leader, but he is standing alongside, listening and encouraging a young person as they work out together what it means to be children of God.

I realise encouraging community in this way presents a whole heap of safeguarding issues, we have had to think on our feet and outside the box, whilst ensuring the safety of young people. This is another continual journey.

However, I am convinced we need to encourage people to leave the safety and security of running a youth programme, step out from behind the games, and the pre-packaged versions of the Gospel and travel alongside a young person or two as they journey, often to dark places, showing them that they are made in the image of God, exploring with them what Gospel means whilst standing in the crap and darkness with them. O wait a minute, isn't that incarnation? Someone else spent a few years doing that.



Sandra Crawford is Baptist Youth Specialist Minister living in Leyland (near Preston) with her husband Tony, also a Baptist Minister, and two teenage children. She is co-pastor at Leyland Baptist Church which is a small church with a big heart, running alongside the church are two charities: 'SLEAP' a homeless charity for young people and 'The Leyland Project' - 3 community centres serving two social housing estates.

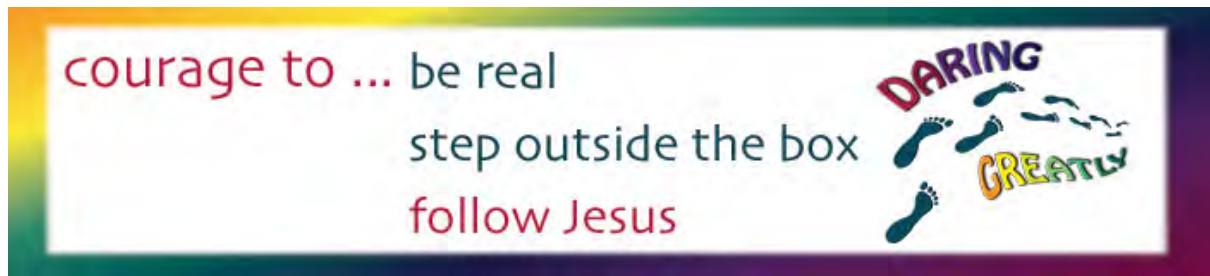
Sandra is also one of the Regional Ministers for North Western Baptist Association, currently working alongside an awesome team of 15 young leaders from churches across the northwest.

She is currently highly frustrated having broken her leg and damaged her knee playing Bubble Football at a youth weekend in July, and is still hobbling around on crutches. The picture is of Sandra, moments before; it was all going so well!

Comment

We shine best in the darkest places.....

Jacqueline



DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS

Geoff Colmer writes:

It's been said that 'spirituality defines our era' and one of the phrases we hear often is 'I'm not into religion but I am into spirituality'. But in our era 'spirituality' is rarely defined and more often simply assumed. Kim Fabricius says, "'Spirituality' is a word suffering from runaway inflation."

So, what does 'spirituality' mean to those who seek to follow Jesus? And more specifically 'courageous spirituality', which in the contemporary usage of the word seems like a contradiction?

Rather than attempt to define spirituality, I wonder if it's more helpful to speak in terms of a number of characteristics:

Spirituality will be about **God**, and more specifically the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Anne Wilkinson-Hayes spoke at the BUGB Assembly in 2010 and drew on 'The Wind in the Willows': 'I beg your pardon,' said the Mole, pulling himself together with an? effort. 'You must think me very rude; but all this is so new to me.? So-this-is-a-River!'

'The River,' corrected the Rat.

'And you really live by the river? What a jolly life!'

'By it and with it and on it and in it,' said the Rat. 'It's brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing. Lord! the times we've had together!'

Anne's encouragement was not to stand on the banks of the river but to enter its flow.

Following from this it will be **substantial**. It's been said that 'theology without spirituality is empty, spirituality without theology is blind.' We're to be seekers after depth and insight.

It will be **authentic**. It will be true to the story of God in Jesus Christ that I have come to inhabit. It will embrace my own story, and be rooted in the real human being that I am. In 'Answering God', Eugene Peterson speaks of 'earthy spirituality'. 'Earthy: down-to-earth, dealing with everydayness, praying while doing the laundry, singing in the snarl of traffic. Spiritual: moved and animated by the Spirit of God and therefore alive to God.'

It will be **intentional**. As a person who made a living as a musician for a number of years, there are no short-cuts without practice. I know of few gifted musicians, only gifted, disciplined, hard-working musicians. And while we may not want to apply 'work' to spirituality, there is no escape from some kind of focus and discipline.

It will be **creative**. We follow a God of inexhaustible creativity and imagination. And God has made us creative and imaginative human beings. So there is no right way, though many helpful guides. And we are created with difference. Some of us are extroverts, some introverts, and many not so straightforwardly defined. Spirituality should give life, provide nourishment, and result in the flowering of our relationship with God.

It will be **passionate**. We all express our passion in different ways, and while even the most demonstrably passionate of us will not be completely passionate all the time, there will be that whole-heartedness. The Northumbria Community speaks of 'the one thing', Psalm 27.

And here's the crunch - it will be **courageous**, or vulnerable.

These words by Mike Riddell, speaking of spirituality, found a resonance with me. 'Seeing we have a cross at the heart of our faith, it is stupid to ignore the reality of suffering, or pretend there is some escape from it. We need a faith that will stand strong in the presence of pain, and not run from it.' We recognise that the shape of our discipleship is cruciform, and therefore will be 'acquainted with grief'.

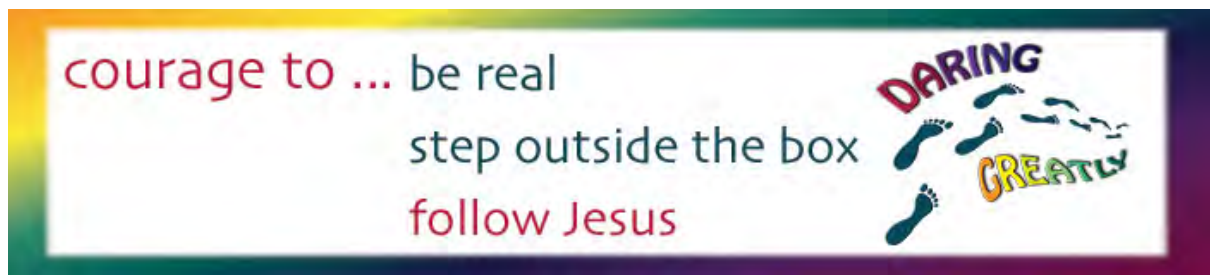
The Baptist Order for Ministry, of which I'm a part, uses this prayer every day, expressing something of our spirituality and the need for courage to follow Jesus.

***Living God, enable us this day
to be pilgrims and companions:
committed to the way of Christ,
faithful to the call of Christ,
discerning the mind of Christ,
offering the welcome of Christ,
growing in the likeness of Christ,
engaging in the mission of Christ,
in the world that belongs to Christ.***



Geoffrey Colmer has been the Regional Minister/Team Leader of the Central Baptist Association since 2004. Previously he served churches in Rye and Melton Mowbray. In what seems like a former life, Geoff was a professional musician, playing bassoon in the English Northern Philharmonia.

Geoff is married to Cazz, a primary school Deputy Head, and they have two married sons and one granddaughter. They live in Milton Keynes, 'the world's best new city'.



DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS

Ruth Gouldbourne writes:

On discovering that I am history!

For many years I have studied and have taught history, especially history of the church. It is a discipline I have grown to love, and to love teaching. Central to my teaching, and the reason why I believe history matters is the promise that it has not always been this way, things have changed, and therefore, if all is not as it could, should and might be, change is possible.

As such, part of what I have taught has focussed on people, telling stories about them, setting them in context, understanding why they might have done what they did, and what were the implications. I have told stories of amazing folk; people who dared greatly, and changed things, people in whose daring greatly glimpses of the kingdom are seen. And among these people have been women in ministry – some I have known and am deeply grateful for, some I have heard stories of, some way back in history who have shaped thinking and possibility.

I have loved teaching this. It has given me energy, and I have seen it give energy and encouragement to others, especially to women seeking ways to serve – not always in formal ministry, but often in contexts where roles, expectations, possibilities were determined not on call and gifting, but because of gender and gender assumptions. And I have regarded many of the women about whom I have taught as heroes, as amazing, as wise and significant, as daring greatly in inspirational ways.

So, it was with some surprise that I discovered, from the writings of one of our younger ministers that I am not a historian (or rather, I am not only a historian), I am also history. She has been writing a dissertation for her degree, and has been examining women in ministry and attitudes to this in Baptist life. I am really glad she has been doing the research, and I think it is very important.

And she talks in her work about me and about several others of my cohort in ministry, and some of the things we did, and some of the arguments we had, and some of the changes we inaugurated and some of the possibilities we opened up.

And I didn't know we had.

I mean, I did, in that I remember what we did. When she asked me about various things, I remembered what we had done, and why and how. I recognised the things we wrote, I even remember the typos in the scripts, I remember some of the pains and many of the delights.

But what I have had to struggle to come to terms with is that we – or at least I – did not think of ourselves as doing anything particularly important or special. We were doing what was in front of us; we were responding, with as much faith and integrity as we could, we as much wisdom as we could summon, and sometimes with tears and sometimes with laughter, to the situations that we were in.

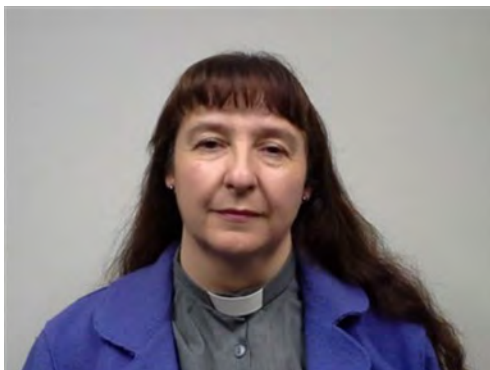
And now, somebody else telling the story, accurately as far as I can tell, and from a distance of 20 or so years, is telling the kind of story I have told in teaching history – a story of people who dared greatly and changed things, whose great daring made a difference.

It didn't feel like it at the time. It didn't seem to be that powerful or significant. It was just what was there to be done.

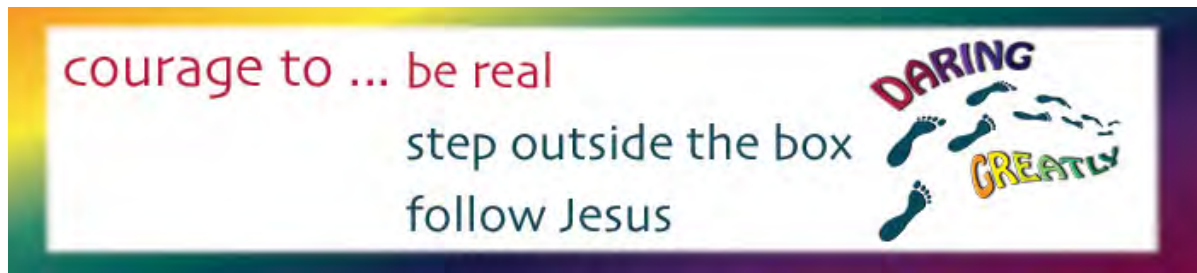
I have thought of myself as somebody who hasn't really dared much; who has been greatly attracted by this theme, but also deeply rebuked by it, in comparison with the people, and in particular the women about whom I have taught – the people who really did things, really changed this, really went out on a limb and made a difference.

Maybe, just maybe they didn't know that that was what they were doing. Maybe they were doing what was in front of them. Maybe they, with as much integrity, faith, wisdom and hope as they could find, were responding to the situation in which they were. And in them, through them, by them the world was changed.

I am deeply humbled at the thought that when I didn't know what I was doing, it mattered, and it made a difference. Maybe daring greatly is to do with faithfully and with integrity and hope, living who we are, and letting God do whatever it is that God wants to do through it – without being too anxious about what that might be.



Ruth Gouldbourne grew up in a Baptist manse and, having promised herself never to marry a minister, didn't, but became one instead. She was ordained in 1988, and served as assistant minister of Bunyan Meeting Free Church in Bedford for seven years. Then she taught history and doctrine at Bristol Baptist College for 11 years, leaving there in 2006 in order to become co-minister at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in London. She is married to Ian, loves him, novels, theatre and making Little Things. She hates having her photo taken!



DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY ... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL

Barbara Carpenter writes:

The courage to be real... about spirituality... about **my** spirituality, or at least how I understand spirituality... in public...?

Well, dare I? For the question is, how real can I be?

That question may be a contradiction in terms – surely something is either real or it isn't - but I suspect that so often we are much less than real or honest about our spiritual life than we could be. So part of this encouragement to 'dare greatly' during this year is to dare to be real and honest with those around us about our walk with God. I suspect this is true for all of us, but maybe especially true for those of us who find ourselves in church leadership; we're the professionally spiritual people, so to be real about the struggles of our day to day lives is hard and takes a degree of trust for us to do so.

Perhaps too we need the courage to be real in living as spiritual people. To truly dare to let our spirituality inform our day to day living; to not dress our faith up in jargon and live it out in a holy clique, but to get real in the mess of our lives and the lives of those with whom we journey. I've led courses on spirituality on and off over recent years – I was going to say 'taught', but I'm not sure spirituality is something you can teach, its explored or caught and lived, but becomes something else when we teach it. So this is my definition of what I think I'm doing!

Spirituality is to do with things that touch us at the deepest level of our beings. For us as Christians, therefore, spirituality is about the presence and the work of the three-in-one-God in our lives; recognising our createdness by God the Father, seeking to live in the pattern of Jesus Christ the Son and being shaped and empowered by the Holy Spirit. There is no 'one size fits all', but there are traditions and patterns in which we are shaped and formed and by which we can be helped and which, in different ways, unite us.

This, of course, is not the only, or even the best, definition of spirituality but it's where I'm working from at this point in my life. Because I think one of the things I need to be real about when I reflect on my own spirituality, and that of others with whom I'm privileged to walk, is the fact that it changes... what once fed and nurtured is maybe not what feeds now. That, in many ways is obvious

really; Paul writes of it and the writer to the Hebrews addresses it too; we know in human terms our taste and need for different physical food changes over time; so why should we believe that our spiritual appetite and need should stay the same?

What does need to stay the same is the commitment to spend regular time God, with no agenda but his; but it's how that time is facilitated that varies. For me sometimes it's been by being led in a time of prayer via a podcast, by reading Scripture using traditional Bible notes, or by using the lectionary, Bible in a year, a daily liturgy etc, etc.

When I first found myself in the place where what I'd been brought up to do wasn't 'working' any more, I felt decidedly anxious – from the time of my conversion in my teens a daily quiet time with 'Every Day with Jesus' was part of my life; but somehow God seemed to be silent and I couldn't seem to find him. A conversation with a wise friend led to the suggestion of trying something new – using my imagination to engage with Scripture rather than simply engaging with it in my head. It felt like a very strange thing to do – dare I step outside the structure that had been handed to me, rather like the Holy Grail? I did, and my relationship with God moved to a new place. And so it has been over the years – every now and then I've hit a brick wall and had to re-evaluate my spiritual practice, sometimes trying something completely new, sometimes returning to a previously loved routine – and each time God has opened up new horizons.

So why have I spent a few hours of my day writing this? Because it matters. It matters that we dare to have the courage to be real about our spirituality. If we're honest we know that we can't be anything but real about it with God, try though we might – for he knows everything – but we need to be real with ourselves and with those around us; for then the transforming power of God's Spirit is released, not just in our own lives, but also into the life of the world.



Barbara Carpenter is minister of Stoke St Gregory Baptist Church in rural Somerset, where she is also Chair of Governors at the local school. She has just begun her second term of office as a Baptist Union Trustee. She is a trained spiritual director and retreat leader and is an Associate Member of the Iona Community. Barbara is married to Bill and together they have three scarily grown-up children and three grandchildren – she is still slightly bemused as to how she is old enough for this to be the case! Spending time with family, reading and knitting are

ways of relaxing and she is currently in rehearsal for a local production of 'Oliver!', which is different, though at the moment, not entirely relaxing!

courage to ... be real

step outside the box
follow Jesus



DARING GREATLY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY ... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL

Phil Jump writes:

It must have been one of the most bizarre meetings in history; let's face it, high-ranking military officers don't send their domestic staff with a squaddie half way across an occupied country because an angel told them to.

"So why've you invited me?" asks Peter

"Dunno" replies Cornelius "except an Angel told me to – why have you come?"

"Not sure either; all my life I've been told to avoid people like you – then God challenged me about my eating habits; you guys turned up and I think the two things are related."

The full story is in Acts chapter 10, and as quite a few of the churches I serve know, it's an episode that I have been particularly challenged by in recent months. It strikes me that it also resonates with our president's 'Daring Greatly' theme.

As a high ranking officer, Cornelius would have been no stranger to courage – you didn't get the top jobs in the Roman Army without being stern in the face of danger and all that. But his devotion to God required an altogether different kind of courage. The courage to put the needs and wellbeing of occupied citizens before the macho image of being a tough soldier; the courage to risk looking an idiot by sending an envoy to find a complete stranger he'd never heard of, on the say-so of an angelic vision. The courage to be real!

And Peter needed courage too; the courage to move beyond the safe and familiar and venture into territory that all of his traditional instincts would have told him to avoid. Courage to set aside his traditional prejudices, and to accept the invitation of an 'outsider' without really knowing why or what would be the outcome. To come for no other reason than a gnawing conviction that this was the will and purpose of God.

And this simple encounter was to have monumental consequences. Just a few chapters later, Peter cites his experience at the house of Cornelius in an influential speech at the Council of Jerusalem. It is here that the Church reaches the watershed realisation that Christianity is not intended to remain within the confines of Judaism, but is a truly international and multi-cultural faith.

It was also a complete re-calibration of their understanding of mission. For a largely Jewish church, the idea of proselytizing was no new one, but helping others to become the people of God was about drawing them in to their own exclusive club, teaching them to act like them, think like them, look like them and follow every ritual that they followed.

Peter was invited to imagine that perhaps mission might be about discovering God at work in places and in lives that he had never previously dreamed of encountering. And with a thousand doubts spinning around in their heads, Peter and his companions receive a compelling glimpse of reality that convinces them that this indeed is the case. God's Spirit comes, tangibly inhabiting this ramshackle group of confused Gentiles and dispelling any doubt that this is anything other than the real deal.

We have been challenged to have the courage to be real – which in part is an invitation to embrace and be honest about our own weakness and vulnerability; to reach out to our world with a faith that is grounded in the realities of human experience and not confined to the safe havens of religious institutions.

But if we are to be real, how do we define reality? What does it mean to be real participants in God's mission? What is real mission? I sense that increasingly our response to these questions is to engage in yet another round of busyness; to embark upon another raft of activities that someone, somewhere has assured us 'works'. And though it never quite delivers, before we've even had time to ask why, the urgency of the next project is upon us, as we dutifully answer the call of the next big idea.

Busyness can be a great way of drowning out the call to be real. So long as I am engrossed in a catalogue of activities on God's behalf, I can avoid those penetrating encounters in which I lay myself open to God's scrutiny and purpose. I can forever be engaged in a pattern of discipleship that involves doing more things rather than growing more like Christ.

I find it interesting that the source of this profound episode is two men's commitment to simply spend time in God's presence. For Peter that was found on the roof of a tanner's house in Joppa; for Cornelius, through an angelic interruption in the mid-afternoon; but for each it was rooted in their simple devotion to knowing God and growing in God's likeness. What ensued might have had massive consequences, but it began by simply being real.



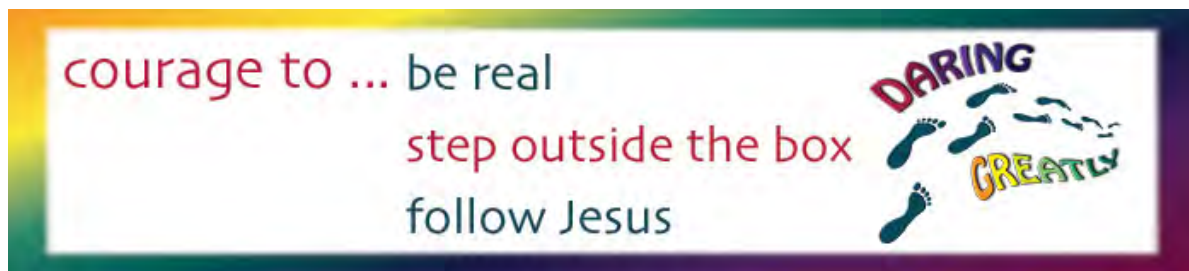
Phil Jump was born and bred in Liverpool and began his working life as an electrical engineer in the Cammell Laird Shipyard in Birkenhead. He left the city to train for Christian ministry at Spurgeon's College, London and spent nine years as minister of New Addington Baptist Church in a recognised area of social deprivation on the edge of Croydon.

Phil is married to Jan and they have three children, he is an avid supporter of Liverpool Football Club and enjoys playing and listening to music. He currently serves as Regional Minister for the North Western Baptist Association, comprising over 150 churches across the North West of England and North Wales. He is chair of the Industrial Christian Fellowship, a longstanding Christian Charity that seeks to help Christians connect their faith with the world of work. He has recently worked for Baptists Together as project leader for the IGNITE ministry review and as interim representative on the Joint Public Issues Team.

Comment

Thanks for raising that question, Phil. many of us have forgotten to dare - now Ken Evans at our Chester Street church is beginning to work with T4G, a Ministry to the local homeless [paulsavedbygrace@live.co.uk]. God Bless

Michael



DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX

Stuart Blythe writes:

GETTING PHYSICAL

The idiom, stepping outside the box is often used as a metaphor. It refers to the development of unconventional, new, and creative ideas. Some contexts welcome such creativity. In others, however, it can require courage to challenge the established conventions. Such to be sure involves vulnerability and can incur the risk of rejection and expulsion. This vulnerability may be heightened by an inner yet very real self-questioning of that which you are proposing. That which you are proposing and verbalising may indeed be unconventional to you.

The above notwithstanding, the courage to step outside the box may require the courage to physically step outside the box. That is, the courage required may be the courage to place one's body for the sake of one's established or developing convictions in new and perhaps unconventional locations and settings. Here new ideas meet unconventional settings with nothing less than your body on the line. Here not simply your ideas but your self will be tried and tested. Here indeed the personal is political and the political personal. Perhaps at times nothing less than such courage and such physical stepping will suffice to bring change.

It seems to me that this sort of stepping was demonstrated in the life of the Suffragettes in their campaigning for full voting rights and a more egalitarian society. It is demonstrated in their taking to the streets. Such an act involved relinquishing the positive protections of the very system they were challenging. In turn it was an act that those who represented the system could exploit by as it were leaving the women to the mob because they were asking for it. The courage in so acting was not simply ideological but physical – perhaps a physical response to an issue in which the physical nature of the body played such a part.

I for one find it encouraging that some of these campaigners appear to have learned their art, some would say, physical performance art, from the practices of street events and open-air preaching, as promoted not least by the activities of the Salvation Army (de Vries, 1998). I also find it encouraging that for others it was their faith that motivated them to place their bodies in careers that were not traditionally thought of as suitable for women. Such 'Angels' indeed refused to stay in the house (Hawksley, 2013). They did not simply challenge traditional ideas but challenged them as they literally and physically stepped out of the box. And as Leslie Hill in an article entitled *Suffragettes*

Invented Performance Art concludes, 'And by the way, they got the vote too' (2000, p156).

I once heard New Testament scholar Ched Myers say, well I paraphrase his somewhat more colourful and descriptive turn of phrase, "Hope is where your body is". He meant that it is an expression of our hope when we are ready and willing to place our bodies in different physical situations for the sake of positive transformation. Of course people, men and women, can place and use their bodies, perhaps with great courage, but for the harm of others and as instruments of violence. This was indeed the case with some in the Suffragette movement. This is a sometimes neglected aspect of the narrative which perhaps betrays an ongoing difficulty with the nature of the bodies involved. To be sure then, courage and physicality are not necessarily ethically positive. But of course Jenni's call was not to be courageous and step outside the box. It was not even, as in my interpretation, to get physical. Rather, it was to do these things as we follow Jesus. Accordingly, his example provides the pattern of movement to be imitated in the faithful performance of our own lives, his presence the source of our courage, and his vision the substance of our hope. There is something unconventional and creative about such thinking. Yet, with those women marchers and open-air preachers I still cannot help but feel that it is thinking that involves us, me, in having the courage to not simply take my ideas but also my body out of the box.

(SOME READING STUFF)

- Lucinda Hawksley, *March, Women, March: Voices of the Women's Movement from the first feminist to votes for women* (London: Andre Deutch, 2013).
- Leslie Hill, *Suffragettes Invented Performance Art* in Goodman, Lizbeth, and Jane de Gay, eds, *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2000)
- Jacqueline R de Vries, *Transforming the Pulpit: Preaching and prophecy in the British Women's Suffrage Movement* in Kienzle, Beverly Mayne, and Pamela J. Walker, eds, *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* (London: University of California Press, 1998)

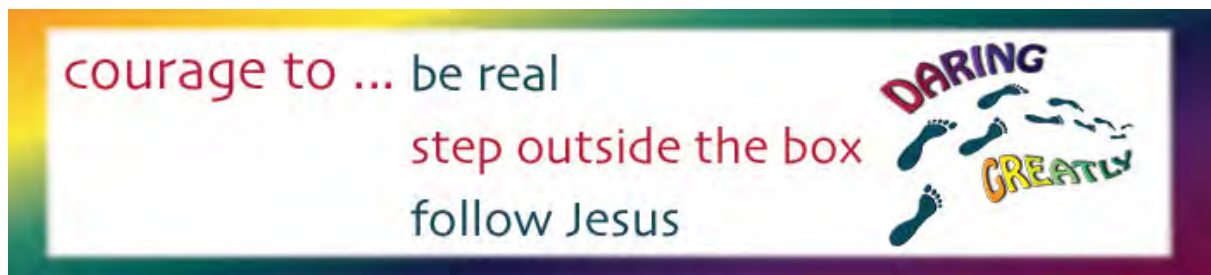


Stuart Blythe comes from Glasgow, Scotland. He is married to Susanne and they have two grown up children. He is a Scottish Baptist minister, has pastored in two churches, taught at the Scottish Baptist College, and is currently the Rector of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre in Amsterdam where he and Susanne now live. He plays the bagpipes and finds cycling in Amsterdam a daily adventure although it is something which has yet to do while playing the bagpipes.

Comment

Thanks for this - in my house I have an old piece of furniture which has the scorch marks from a Suffragette arson attack! Of course their cause was right... but it's a complicated old world, isn't it?

Andrew



DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX

Carmel Murphy writes:

In the last couple of weeks, the stories of two courageous women have appeared in my inbox that have:

fuelled my thoughts on what it might mean to 'dare greatly'

reminded me of the often harsh reality that awaits when we 'step outside of the box'

and (despite the difficulties) beckoned me back to the boundaries

The first woman of valour I was recently reacquainted with was Dorothy Day (8 November, 1897 - 29 November, 1980). In the article commemorating the anniversary of her death, she was introduced as a radical social activist, pacifist and journalist, who cofounded the Catholic Worker movement, which began with the publication of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper in 1933. Seeking to offer hope to those hit hardest by the Great Depression, her and her friend Peter Maurin used the paper to highlight the plight of the poor, encouraging people to take action and find creative ways of fighting issues of injustice. A convert to Catholicism, Day was educated by Maurin in a theology which resonated strongly with her socialist roots and became the foundation of their work together. It reintroduced what would be deemed 'the radical edge', reminding people that to be a person of faith is to be profoundly political, which means not only helping those in need but also working to challenge and transform the very systems and structures which oppress, marginalise and create the need in the first place. **Daring Greatly involves challenging the powers.**

Although with hindsight, Day is now heralded a heroine, recently being referenced by the Pope himself as a 'great American' in a speech he gave to Congress, at the time she was deemed deeply controversial. She was often considered too communist to be Catholic and made a habit of holding both the Church and the country to account. For example, more than thirty years before the Catholic Church accepted pacifism as a legitimate Christian stance (preferring to promote Just War), Day advocated the complete renunciation of war and constantly challenged the decisions made to go to battle declaring "we have failed as Americans to live up to our principles". **Daring Greatly involves going against the flow.**

The second woman of valour I was reminded of was Rosa Parks (4 February 1913 - 24 October 2005). The first of December is one of two designated 'Rosa Parks Days' (the other being her

birthday, 4 February). This year it marked 60 years since she refused to give up her seat in the 'colored section' of a public bus, to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama, resulting in her arrest for civil disobedience. At the time, Parks was 42 years old and had been an active member within the civil rights movement for many years, fighting the cause of oppressed individuals and campaigning for racial equality. On the day of her arrest Parks was tired, not particularly physically tired, but tired of 'giving in', stating "I had not planned to get arrested. I had plenty to do without having to end up in jail. But when I had to face that decision, I didn't hesitate to do so because I felt that we had endured that too long. The more we gave in, the more we complied with that kind of treatment, the more oppressive it became." **Daring Greatly involves standing up for what we believe in.**

She was not the first to fight the segregation laws in this way though; others before her had also refused to yield their seats. However, it was in response to her arrest that the movement organised a bus boycott, encouraging the black population of Montgomery to avoid taking the bus, in a non-violent act of protest against the ongoing persecution. The boycott lasted 381 days and resulted in the city repealing its law regarding segregation on buses. It was a monumental moment in the civil rights movement which propelled Parks into the limelight. She has since been named 'an iconic figure', 'the first lady of civil rights' and 'the mother of the freedom movement' but like Day, this all came at huge personal cost. Following her arrest she lost her job, was regularly in receipt of death threats and had to move away from Montgomery. **Daring Greatly involves giving sacrificially.**

These stories have reminded me that conjuring the courage to step outside of the box commences with the conviction that 'something is not right', whether that be in me, my neighbour or within the wider world. This is coupled with the conviction that 'another world is possible', that things do not have to remain the way they are. In fact, I am called to make difference because ultimately daring greatly is (in the words of Tom Sine) "to respond to the invitation to join in with God, to be co-conspirators with him, and get involved in subverting the craziness, the dysfunction, the sinfulness of the world, with acts of compassion and love. These gestures may seem small, insignificant and at times foolish but they add up and go a long way towards revealing the Kingdom in our midst."

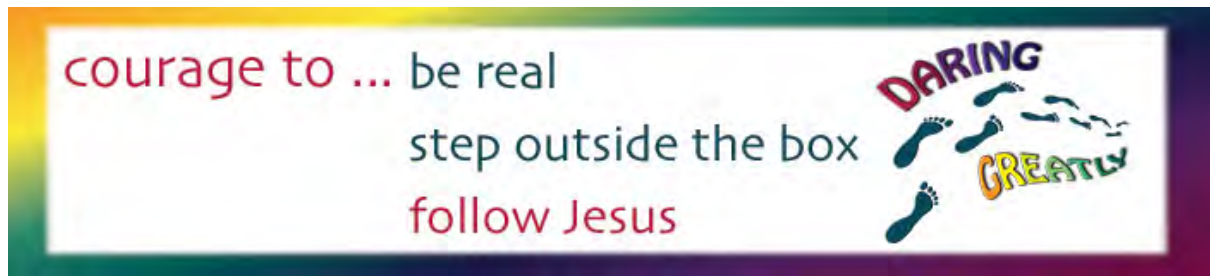


Carmel Murphy is a Baptist minister living in Stoke-on-Trent where she co-leads an Urban Expression Team and works part-time as a Community Organiser. She's a tea drinker, conversation maker, cake baker and craft creator, who has a weak spot for words and an appreciation of aesthetics.

Comment

Here is a link to my article on Dorothy Day in the International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1474225X.2013.780400>

Rob



DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS

Susan Myatt writes:

Hindsight is a wonderful thing! Reflecting back I believe God was calling me into ministry many, many years ago but I did not recognise this and ignored it. I did not consider it as a reality for a long while. Me? A minister? I'm Deaf!

Following Jesus is the biggest challenge of my life and scary too. However, there are many stories and characters in the Bible that have inspired me, in particular, Bartimaeus the blind man. He who was marginalised and an outcast from society, but that didn't stop him from putting his faith in Jesus and following him. Bartimaeus was blind and I am deaf; different circumstances but in some ways, similar experiences.

I had struggled for years when attending a hearing church: understanding the language, following a service, being unable to receive and to interact with others all compounded my feelings of alienation and unworthiness. But God had other plans and I needed to accept and obey his calling!

I was hungry and thirsty to know more about God. I would ask many questions at Bible studies and my excitement at exploring and knowing Jesus grew, but I still didn't think I was clever enough to accept to his calling.

About ten years ago for the first time, I visited a 'deaf church' led by deaf, where services were in British Sign Language (BSL). What an impact that made on me. The Holy Spirit was revealed and I allowed myself to open the door a tiny crack, the door that I had firmly shut, the door that was my calling into ministry.

I got increasingly involved in the deaf church and found using my first language very exciting. I learned more about my deaf culture and grew in confidence in my deaf identity. Jesus was challenging me to go deeper than I thought possible.

I was offered a place on a course at Chester University to explore theology and ministry, which was delivered in BSL by deaf and hearing tutors! God's calling to ministry became stronger.

I attended a hearing Baptist Church as well as the deaf church, which was part of the Anglican

denomination. I knew that God was calling me into ministry and I assumed I would be in the Church of England. There was already a structure in place and deaf people had gone before me to be trained and then to minister within the Anglican Church. But in the Baptist Church? This was unprecedented! Again God showed me that with him nothing is impossible. How true it is that God's ways are not our ways. Doors opened, but I needed to trust God in order to step out into the unknown. This was risky stuff! Not just for me but for the Baptist Union as well. This is the first time they had had to try to cater for a deaf theological student, and the first time I had ever had to study at such a level in a hearing environment.

I trusted God to give me the strength and courage needed to follow his path, and with wonderful support from the students and tutors, three years later I finally graduated from Northern Baptist College with a theology degree.

I have learnt so much from both hearing and deaf. I feel God is calling me to minister both to the hearing and deaf communities and to work to bring the two groups together in mutual respect.

When people think about mission it is rare that they consider the deaf community. The Deaf are a hidden group that I feel need reaching. Most churches are not accessible to Deaf people in their first language and culture, I feel called to be a bridge between the two communities and to reduce the barriers.

God is calling me to minister to the Deaf; to share my knowledge of him and to minister in ways that are appropriate to their culture and needs from a deaf perspective. By teaching in their first language of BSL they are more able to become disciples and then encouraged to become leaders. God has empowered me, but it is his power and his glory that are the driving force.

Currently my work placement is at Rising Brook Baptist Church at Stafford and I have established a Deaf café at church. At the café we share and discuss study issues and Bible passages. We explore responses using Deaf culture and language. This can include visual prayers, dramas, and art. I am able to offer pastoral care to this group of people. Several Deaf people attend church services and two have been baptised and others have made commitments to follow Jesus.

My ministry has given me the opportunity to explore the riches of both worlds and to bring them together. Not an easy task! But it is rare that God leads us down to easy paths but he does give us his strength and courage to persevere.

My journey continues as I follow Jesus, trusting him to provide his courage, his strength, his grace and humility, to be who he wants me to be and to introduce others to him.



Susan Myatt was born profoundly deaf to a deaf father and hearing mother. After leaving school she worked in a men's tailor shop and later trained and practised as an assistant accountant. Susan taught British Sign Language level one and level two at Tamworth College for 12 years in the evenings. She has two grown up sons and still lives at Tamworth.

She graduated from Northern Baptist College in 2015 and currently has a work placement at Rising Brook Baptist Church at Stafford. When not working, studying or socialising Susan enjoys photography,

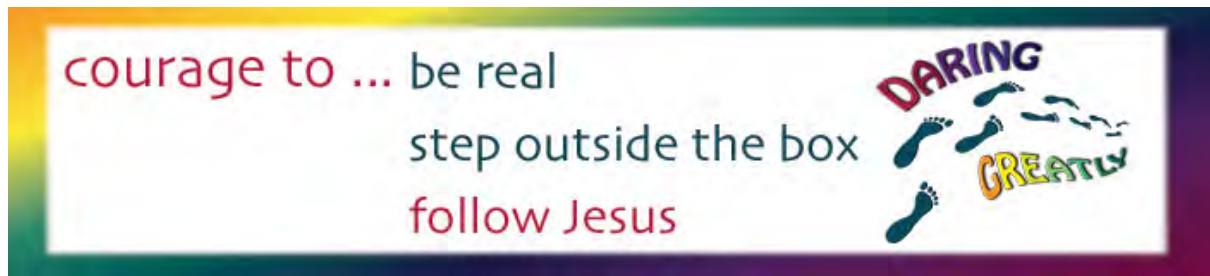
sewing anything crafty. She is also an avid science fiction fan!

Watch Susan in conversation with Glen Marshall, one of her tutors and a Co-Principal at Northern Baptist College at http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/447639/The_Big_Conversation.aspx

Comment

What an amazing Lady!!! What an amazing story!!! What a journey!!! What a difference when we allow God to work in us and through us. He brings confidence and the courage to achieve. Pray the journey will continue to even greater place. We serve an awesome God

Sue



DARING GREATLY THROUGH MISSION... WITH THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS

Andy Williams writes:

DARING GREATLY, THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW JESUS BY WORKING TO TRANSFORM VIOLENT EXTREMISM THROUGH INTER FAITH RELATING

“We refuse to be enemies, Spread Hummus not Hate”. They were mainly students who stood behind the two banners bearing these slogans. They were from all faiths, nations and cultures and had come together to express their unity and commitment to live together in peace. They had indeed ‘spread hummus’ on their pitta bread lunch as they listened to representatives from different student faith societies speak of their commitment to unity and peace. This event was in Manchester and was part of a global faith twinning scheme, supported locally by the faith network I work with. There were about forty students present and there was a great atmosphere. Reflecting on it, it would be easy to conclude, “it was nice, but it won’t change the world”... and yet... and yet such an event felt like a radical alternative to the fracturing world reported daily in the news at the time in December 2015.

Violent extremism is now arguably the greatest threat to people across the world. It includes terrorism and violent acts, which could seemingly be committed anywhere and anytime, as the recent attacks in Paris and Beirut at the end of last year show. What does it mean to follow Jesus in this context?

Seeking to achieve religious and/or political ambitions through violence is nothing new. The Zealot movement was active in the time of Jesus. They wanted to liberate Israel from Roman occupation. We’re told that Simon was a Zealot (Mark 3: 18-19), though some modern translations use other terms. What was the relationship of Jesus to this movement? One of the motives of Judas for betraying Jesus was perhaps his disappointment and anger that Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God in word and deed did not embrace violent extremism as a means for establishing the rule and way of God, or more particularly overthrowing the Roman occupation. Jesus rejected the option of violent extremism and faced violence with self sacrifice. So what might it mean to dare greatly and have the courage to follow Jesus in the context of violent extremism today? Here are some initial thoughts:

To be incarnational in our discipleship, resisting the temptation to withdraw from and actively engaging with, the complexity of the world.

To reject and challenge violent extremism from any quarter.

To assert the equality of all human life as 'made in the image of God' and that to destroy human life is always wrong. This may lead us not only to challenge violent extremism, but also government sanctioned bombing campaigns.

To advocate the centrality of the love of God for all, expressed in Christ.

To build relationships with people of all faiths and none, loving our neighbours, especially people in communities from which violent extremists have been recruited.

To use language and promote the use of language that clearly distinguishes between faith/religion and violent extremism. In Manchester, our faith network, along with many others has adopted the term 'Daesh' in preference to ISIS/ IS/ ISIL/ Islamic State. As I understand it, Daesh is a pun on a pejorative Arabic term meaning 'one who sows disunity' and it is widely used by those opposed to the aims and agenda of this group. It has the benefit of distinguishing the group from Islam.

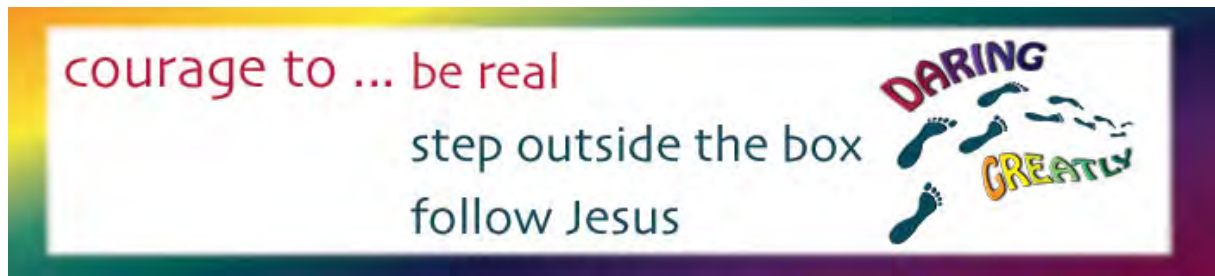
To opt for relating positively to the young, creating and supporting opportunities for inter faith encounters and relationships, in recognition of the vulnerability of the young to being groomed for violent extremism. These positive encounters and relationships hold out the opportunity to realise and develop a valuing of the other, breaking down stereotypes. I recognise there have to be ways to spot and respond to those who are groomed for violent extremism, but surely most of its prevention is about building a sense of belonging and valuing the richness of a diverse community.

For several years I chaired a project called *Faith Friends* which placed pairs of Christians and Muslims workers in secondary schools. As *Faith Friends* they were a bit like chaplains, available to and working with the young people, but usually together as a pair. I was involved in recruiting both Christians and Muslims to serve as *Faith Friends* and as Chair of the project I expected that one day I would have to respond to a dispute between a pair of *Faith Friends*. However, that day never came. Whatever tensions there may have been about a Christian and a Muslim working together, each pair was able to work them out. By contrast they all learned much, became firm friends, as well as colleagues and enjoyed working together, as they still do.

So how about it? In a world that seems to be more complex and dangerous, will we resist retreating into our churches and follow Jesus in the complexity and messiness of the world? Courage is needed to dare greatly, to follow Jesus by working to transform violent extremism through inter faith relating.



Andy Williams is married, has two adult daughters, and reluctantly shares his home with a dog and two cats. Ordained in 1990 he has served as the minister of two churches and has been at Sion Baptist Church (SBC) in Burnley since 1998. He is a founding member of the inter faith project *Building Bridges in Burnley*. In 2013 he became the half-time Community Development Worker of Faith Network for Manchester and continues as joint minister (half time) of SBC. He is the moderator of the Baptist Inter Faith Working Group.



DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL

Charmaine Howard writes:

“What is real? How do you define ‘real’? If you’re talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then ‘real’ is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.” Morpheus (The Matrix)

There are many definitions of reality and in contemporary society 'keeping it real' is considered to be a good thing. We seem to base this judgement on the premise that 'reality is the world or the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them'. At the same time we accept that reality is filtered through our perceptions, created within our own minds and so is different for each person. We hold simultaneously the beliefs that reality exists in its own right and outside of ourselves, and that reality is created by us in our minds, through our perceptions. Absolutism and relativism held in tension. I would like to share with you the ways in which this tension is played out in the lives of some women, as I explore the theme of daring greatly through women with the courage to be real.

Jesus cured Mary Magdalene of seven demons. This changed her life, set her free and gave her the courage to follow Jesus as he performed miracles, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, raising the dead, teaching the crowds. She stood by and watched as they crucified Jesus, making a note of where they buried his body and determined to return to make sure his body was properly prepared for burial. Mary had encountered Jesus and he became her reality, the lens through which she viewed the world. And I believe that it is the same for all who encounter Jesus. Our lives change and the living God becomes our focus as we adopt kingdom values. That is the reality that we have in common – the absolute reality that exists outside of us – but we each experience and live out that reality in different ways.

For Clara in Cyprus, keeping it real means visiting night clubs every evening, befriending women who have been sold into the sex trade and letting them know that she offers them the opportunity to leave. This is dangerous work for Clara as the traffickers are prepared to maim and kill to maintain control of the women they see as their assets. Yet Clara lives out her call to be good news for the oppressed and marginalised by creating safe houses for those who are able to escape, and setting up pre-owned clothing stores where the women learn new skills and a means of earning to support themselves.

In London, young women campaign to change laws that penalise women who are trafficked. They follow their call to give voice to the marginalised as they point out that the laws on prostitution mean the women are arrested, imprisoned, fined and deported (only to be put to work somewhere else), while the traffickers remain unscathed. Young Christian women support those who are treated as commodities to be enjoyed, used and thrown away when finished with.

Mary of Bethany had a deep personal commitment to Jesus. She sat at his feet hungry to hear his words, to learn from him. She was overcome with love and gratitude that she washed Jesus' feet in expensive perfume and dried them with her hair. She had faith in Jesus – that was her reality.

I have visited many churches over the years, but one that stands out in my memory is a Sri Lankan Christian Fellowship. In this large church of over two hundred people, only two were men. The women had left their children, husbands, parents, friends and way of life to find work in another country. They were mainly in domestic service. Their wages were small, their hours long and their work hard. Their employers could be capricious and cruel. Wages were often withheld on a whim. For this church, reality was complete faith in Jesus' ability to take care of them and the families they had left behind. They were hungry to hear God's word and sang God's praises with ardour and passion in their native tongues. At the end of the service every person wanted to be prayed for. They queued for long periods patiently waiting, secure in the knowledge that God will answer their prayers – a simple, uncluttered faith that, despite their circumstances, Jesus continued to work for their good.

Joanna was one of the women who supported Jesus' ministry. She was one of the women who accompanied Jesus for much of his ministry and was probably present when Jesus was laid in the tomb. Reality for her meant quiet unobtrusive service to her Lord and Saviour.

Our churches are blessed with women like Joanna who quietly serve. They make tea and listen to our concerns – quietly supportive – allowing us to unburden and offload. Women who notice when someone has not attended for a couple weeks, and call just to check they are ok. Women who quietly sit with the frail and fragile, spending time with them, listening to the same stories again and again, saying without words “you are valuable”. These women are the backbone of the church – leading and supporting work in foodbanks, homeless shelters, soup kitchens and home groups. They give generously of their time, energy and resources.

One of the joys of being pastor is that I am able to spend time with older members of our church family. I enjoy hearing their stories and learning from them. I often hear our older ladies bemoaning the fact that, physically they were not able to do the things they used to. This is a source of frustration for them as it invariably leads to a loss of independence. Elizabeth was one such lady. She could no longer bear her own weight and her sight and hearing were failing. She found depending on others for help extremely difficult. Her life had been one of service. She served God by serving others. She had been deacon, organised the soup runs, provided meals on wheels, helped in Sunday School and generally served wherever she was needed. She was convinced that

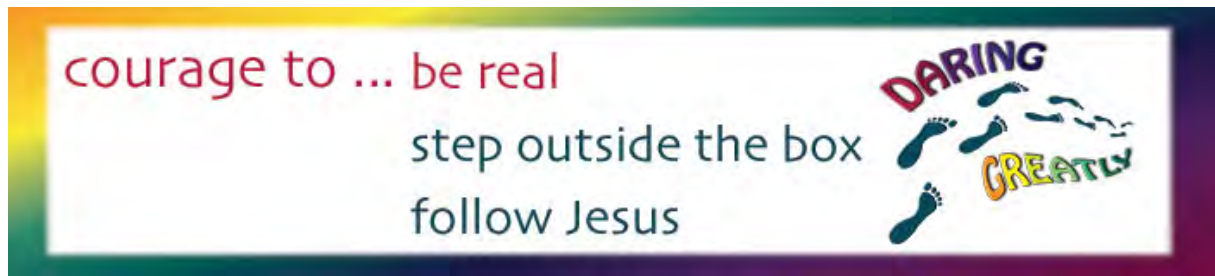
God must have use for her since he kept her alive. She could not do the things she used to, but she could pray. She decided to serve by interceding on behalf of the people in her community. She prays for the shopkeepers, schools, businesses, voluntary groups and neighbours. She prays that God will bless every aspect of their lives and in particular that they would come to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Portia suffers from a range of complex mental health and personality disorders. Her encounter with Jesus did not cure her, but it changed her life. When times are really bad, and Portia finds herself locked in darkness, terror, despair and doubt, when she is confused and does not know what to believe or trust, she turns to Jesus and finds him there in the centre of her internal maelstrom. For Portia, reality is clinging to Jesus her rock, literally the anchor that holds her steady and keeps her safe. He gives her light and hope. And it is this hope that Portia shares with the nurses, doctors and patients that take care of her needs at home or during the time when she has to be in hospital. Being real for Portia is witnessing to others, telling them what Jesus does for her, so they might turn to him and find that he provides what they need in life.

For these Christian women (and I suggest for all Christians) reality is found in Jesus – the one who has always existed, exists now and will exist forever. The courage to dare greatly, the courage to be real, flows from an encounter with Jesus. The way each person responds to that reality is dependent on a range of factors including personality, experience, circumstance and context. It is my hope that these stories have encouraged you in your faith journey, as you explore what daring greatly with the courage to be real means for your life.



Until recently, **Charmaine Howard** was pastor of Northolt Park Baptist Church in London, where she served for seven years.



DARING GREATLY THROUGH WOMEN... WITH THE COURAGE TO BE REAL

David Mayne writes:

Occasionally I am asked if I have any idea what my daughter might do when she grows up. She is only three, so there is plenty of time. At the moment a firefighter is top of the list, but I'm sure that will change soon enough. Sometimes I reply, in jest, that the plan is for her to become the first female Archbishop of Canterbury in a dis-established Church of England. I suspect it far more likely she will be a firefighter, but as things have progressed for our Anglican sisters and brothers in recent years it feels like it is a little bit more possible that there might be a female occupant of the See of Canterbury. It has been a real cause for celebration to see a number of female Bishops appointed in recent months. Long may it continue.

Our own journey as a Union has not been one of a consistent trajectory. Indeed, there are times when, having made significant progress in embracing the ministry of women, we have seen the forces of patriarchy reassert themselves in a variety of ways. Even now we may insist that women are welcome, but this is not the same as embracing the ministry of women. And to be clear, this is not fundamentally a 'women's issue'. Treating it as such has only led to its marginalisation in our corporate discourse. It is something that has a significant impact on us all. The experiences of centuries of misogyny, domination and ignorance are not easily vanquished, and their legacy deeply embedded. The gifts of women have been stifled by the traditions of the church. There are still too many no-go areas for too many women in our life together. Merely hoping that a couple of turns of the generational cycle will bring sufficient change is really not enough.

I'm not exactly sure when I became aware of the amount of pain that many of my colleagues in ministry had suffered as a result of simply being themselves, of being women. Yet, I do know that since I began my theological training just over ten years ago I have heard too many stories of pain and marginalisation from my sisters in Christ. I know that the creative, intelligent, articulate, gifted women that I am blessed to know don't need me to speak on their behalf; they are more than capable of speaking for themselves. Yet, there would be something profoundly troubling if on hearing their stories we are not compelled to ask serious questions of our life together, of ourselves, and seek to work with them to bring change. It is my contention that, on the whole, men have not done enough to publicly take a stand alongside our female colleagues. It is an odd dynamic to be speaking out for change that would directly benefit yourself, at the very least it can be mis-heard as being self-serving, which makes it all the most important that others speak out too.

This is not a secondary issue. It is a primary issue. It's damaging for women, and for men, and for the Kingdom of God.

I think that we run the risk of thinking that this is an issue that we have already dealt with. The experiences of too many excluded and patronised friends would suggest otherwise. Over half the people who make up our Baptist movement are women, and a great deal of the ministry in our churches is undertaken by women.

In my own church community I am blessed to serve with a great number of talented and dedicated women. I am pleased that we have now commended four women in three years for theological training and full-time service overseas, that most of our Elders are female, and that I serve alongside two gifted female ministerial colleagues. Yet, I wonder how easy it would be for a female minister to be called to serve as Lead Pastor here...

I wonder how we can work to see that more of our Regional Ministers and College Tutors are female...

I wonder how we create pathways to ministry for women who God calls who find themselves in churches that won't recognise that call...

I wonder how we can further develop the language we use when we gather together to be more gender inclusive, including how we talk about God...

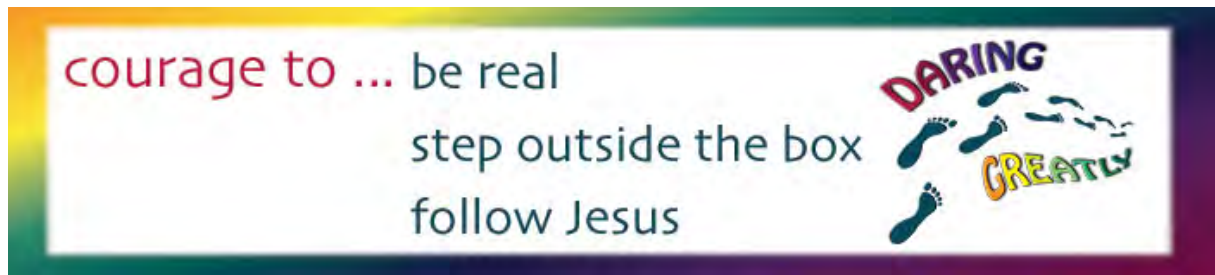
I wonder what it might take for my children to not see women in ministry as 'other' but something totally normal...

I am hopeful, but we still have a lot of work to do.



David Mayne is Lead Pastor of Shoeburyness and Thorpe Bay Baptist Church. He is also currently Moderator of Baptist Union Council and Moderator of the Eastern Baptist Association.

Born and bred in Essex, David is married to Anna and they have two young children. He is a big fan of *The West Wing*, is gripped by the US Presidential Primaries, and is looking forward to spending six days in Washington DC whilst on sabbatical later this year.



DARING GREATLY... THE FINAL BLOG

Jenni Entrican writes:

What a year this has been! Exciting, exhausting, heart-warming, challenging, nourishing, humbling... the list could go on. There are so many things that have delighted me during this year as President, so many people with whom I have enjoyed conversation, sharing, and walking alongside - to, one would hope, our mutual benefit. A real spark of God at work in our lives, an opportunity to be taken to a new place because of that meeting.

And none more so, than what has been a virtual meeting up - this blog. What a kaleidoscope of stimulation, joy, challenge... an opening of minds and hearts to engage with the theme of Daring Greatly, through the courage to be real, to step outside the box, to follow Jesus. Each month, two good friends have faithfully, and creatively, committed themselves to accede to my request to write on one aspect of the theme as it relates to mission, spirituality or women.

And what a rich and varied journey it has been. Really life-enhancing. My very, very grateful thanks to these people.

This week I have spent time reading all eighteen pieces. I can recommend it!
Here are a handful of the nuggets ~

Each starts with 'Daring Greatly through... the courage to be real... step outside the box... follow Jesus.

STEPPING OUTSIDE THE BOX...

... refers to the development of unconventional, new, and creative ideas. Some contexts welcome such creativity. In others, however, it can require courage to challenge the established conventions. Such to be sure involves vulnerability and can incur the risk of rejection and expulsion. This vulnerability may be heightened by an inner yet very real self-questioning of that which you are proposing. That which you are proposing and verbalising may indeed be unconventional to you.

... may require the courage to physically step outside the box. That is, the courage required may be

the courage to place one's body for the sake of one's established or developing convictions in new and perhaps unconventional locations and settings. "Hope is where your body is". **[Stuart]**

... **Daring Greatly involves challenging the powers**; going against the flow; standing up for what we believe in; giving sacrificially... commences with the conviction that 'something is not right', whether that be in me, my neighbour or within the wider world. This is coupled with the conviction that 'another world is possible'.

I am called to make difference because ultimately daring greatly is (in the words of Tom Sine) 'to respond to the invitation to join in with God, to be co-conspirators with him, and get involved in subverting the craziness, the dysfunction, the sinfulness of the world, with acts of compassion and love. These gestures may seem small, insignificant and at times foolish but they add up and go a long way towards revealing the Kingdom in our midst.' **[Carmel]**

... **Many of the young people who didn't fit our big youthwork** were from broken families, failing in the education system and living with a depth of suffering that many church volunteers were not trained for. They did not need to hear a message which highlighted their brokenness, they were already well aware of that, and a conversion to a middle class gospel and church was irrelevant to them.

Stepping outside the box for me... has been stepping out of the big numbers game and deliberately and intentionally working with a few. Walking alongside a young person as they struggle with significance, as they consider their sexuality, as they navigate our ridiculous 'one size fits all' education system, is a huge challenge and is often heart-breaking and emotionally draining... My heart is to encourage a community of faith; a group of people of all ages and abilities, on a journey of searching, learning, discovering, and owning faith. **[Sandra]**

... **If we want to make the gospel known to our generation**, we will need to dare something new in faith. We will need to experiment and find new, creative, counter-cultural, inspiring and innovative ways to advance the Kingdom of God. We can no longer be satisfied with the kind of narrow, individualistic, world-rejecting spirituality, which perpetuates the 'me-and-Jesus' dogma that has left many of our churches so ill-equipped for mission and ministry in our emerging society.

Looking to the future my hope is that the British Baptist community can pioneer a renewed spiritual vision of a 'church without walls' in which the Christian values of honesty, integrity, dignity, freedom, justice and compassion are expressed not only in explicit church activities, but also in the ordinary, mundane realities of everyday life. **[Joshua]**

... **in 2 Tim1:6-7 we read 'I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God**, which is in you for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline'.

... recapture the truth of who God has declared us to be. God has called us to himself, he has invested of himself in us and his Spirit merges with our spirit making us a new creation. God through

his Spirit has given us gifts that we may carry out our assignment as Christians to be a blessing to all people – it is entirely possible to be so much more than we currently are when we truly embrace the truth of who God has made us to be and declared us to be. **[Rupert]**

... What is the box?

Is it big enough to hold the earth of tradition and discipline and practice?

Will my roots go deep enough to find nourishment and stability?

Will I stretch wide enough to allow my foliage to tumble over the edges?

Sixteen of us gather in a little wooden building... All but one tell stories of belonging to main stream churches; Sunday school, choir, confirmation, or joining as young adults for some years. Then disillusionment. One woman speaks of the 'gap' that grew between her and what went on at the front of church as getting bigger and bigger until she dropped off the edge.

... I spread a cloth on the floor in front of me; place home made bread and a cup of wine on it. I use words from a simple contemporary liturgy. This action, blessing, breaking, sharing, is so powerful it hardly needs words.

Holiness fills the space around us and within us... God does not need defending. The things of God cannot belong in any box. All our boxes belong in God. **[Judy]**

... BE REAL

Six years ago I moved from Solihull to Stoke, from an affluent area to a poor one and there's a very strong desire to authenticate myself by how poor our area is. But maybe the first bit of courage needed to be real about mission is to stop playing the 'My-ward's-worse-than-yours' game. Let's be honest, mission is difficult everywhere!

Of course we have all the stuff you'd expect: drugs, unemployment, crime, litter and mental illness. Broken-down houses, children who don't know what a vegetable is, and the general air of being unseen and unheard that makes young people so open to radicalisation. They're here – of course they're here ... these things are very real! **But they are not the only reality. Beauty is real too.** So are love, joy, hope and friendship. In fact these things are more real because they come from the heart of God.

After years of working, relating, praying, setting up projects and events, to our joy a little church has evolved. Real change often seems so elusive... They can be so lovely one week and then turn on you and yell abuse down the phone the next.

I think the courage to be real about mission means knowing both how much and how little you are needed, and learning to be content with that. **[Howard]**

... Somehow we have lost this ability to be broken in front of each other. It does us no favours when it comes to sharing our faith.

Genuine community is rapidly becoming a rare commodity... The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman suggests that community is now a ghost that we resurrect at festivals, only to return to our isolated lives when the weekend is over. Sometimes I feel that the church can be that too – a couple of hours with God and God's family, then back to our privatised lives. If our churches can be 'places of availability and vulnerability', we can offer people a place where they can experience genuine transforming love in the community of God's people. **[Simon]**

... **Perhaps too we need the courage to be real in living as spiritual people.** To truly dare to let our spirituality inform our day to day living; to not dress our faith up in jargon and live it out in a holy clique, but to get real in the mess of our lives and the lives of those with whom we journey.

... one of the things I need to be real about when I reflect on my own spirituality is the fact that it changes... what once fed and nurtured is maybe not what feeds now. What does need to stay the same is the commitment to spend regular time God, with no agenda but his; but it's how that time is facilitated that varies... it matters that we dare to have the courage to be real about our spirituality... for then the transforming power of God's Spirit is released, not just in our own lives, but also into the life of the world. **[Barbara]**

... **Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10).** Cornelius would have been no stranger to courage... but his devotion to God required an altogether different kind of courage. Peter needed courage to move beyond the safe and familiar and venture into territory that all of his traditional instincts would have told him to avoid. This simple encounter was to have monumental consequences... we have been challenged to have the courage to be real – which in part is an invitation to embrace and be honest about our own weakness and vulnerability; to reach out to our world with a faith that is grounded in the realities of human experience and not confined to the safe havens of religious institutions.

... busyness can be a great way of drowning out the call to be real. So long as I am engrossed in a catalogue of activities on God's behalf, I can avoid those penetrating encounters in which I lay myself open to God's scrutiny and purpose. I can forever be engaged in a pattern of discipleship that involves doing more things rather than growing more like Christ. I find it interesting that the source of this profound episode is two men's commitment to simply spend time in God's presence. What ensued might have had massive consequences, but it began by simply being real. **[Phil]**

... **we hold simultaneously the beliefs that reality exists in its own right** and outside of ourselves, and that reality is created by us in our minds, through our perceptions. Absolutism and relativism held in tension. I would like to share with you the ways in which this tension is played out in the lives of some women...

Jesus cured Mary Magdalene of seven demons. This changed her life, set her free and gave her the courage to follow Jesus

Clara in Cyprus, keeping it real means visiting night clubs every evening, befriending women who have been sold into the sex trade

in London, young women campaign to change laws that penalise women who are trafficked

Mary of Bethany had a deep personal commitment to Jesus. She sat at his feet hungry to hear his words

Portia suffers from a range of complex mental health and personality disorders. Her encounter with Jesus did not cure her, but it changed her life. When times are really bad, and Portia finds herself locked in darkness, terror, despair and doubt, when she is confused and does not know what to believe or trust, she turns to Jesus and finds him there in the centre of her internal maelstrom.

Reality is found in Jesus – the one who has always existed, exists now and will exist forever. The courage to dare greatly, the courage to be real, flows from an encounter with Jesus. **[Charmaine]**

... occasionally I am asked if I have any idea what my daughter might do when she grows up. She is only three, so there is plenty of time. At the moment a firefighter is top of the list... Sometimes I reply, in jest, that the plan is for her to become the first female Archbishop of Canterbury in a dis-established Church of England. I suspect it far more likely she will be a firefighter, but as things have progressed for our Anglican sisters and brothers in recent years it feels like it is a little bit more possible that there might be a female occupant of the See of Canterbury.

Our own journey as a Union has not been one of a consistent trajectory. Indeed, there are times when, having made significant progress in embracing the ministry of women, we have seen the forces of patriarchy reassert themselves in a variety of ways. Since I began my theological training just over ten years ago I have heard too many stories of pain and marginalisation from my sisters in Christ...

... there would be something profoundly troubling if on hearing their stories we are not compelled to ask serious questions of our life together, of ourselves, and seek to work with them to bring change. It is my contention that, on the whole, men have not done enough to publicly take a stand alongside our female colleagues. I think that we run the risk of thinking that this is an issue that we have already dealt with. The experiences of too many excluded and patronised friends would suggest otherwise.

I wonder what it might take for my children to not see women in ministry as 'other' but something totally normal... I am hopeful, but we still have a lot of work to do. **[David]**

... FOLLOW JESUS

... our way of working for change is as important as the change we want to create... The Jesus way. The narrow road. The method being as crucial as the message. The resistance of alternative routes to power offered so potently over forty days of weakness and isolation in the desert, and beyond. The articulator of unfamiliar and unexpected messages. The voice of the margins. The prophet. The most inspiring person in town. The social outcast... the way we follow Jesus, as individuals and as church in these days is going to communicate as much about what we believe and hold most precious, as anything we advocate, accomplish or fail at.

I'm left daring to follow Jesus in a world which needs a new approach to power and a workable model of non-coercive leadership, decision-making and resource allocation. Increasingly I find the rigor and support of the Nonviolent Communication (NVC)²⁰ process provides a framework for me to live out a courageous intention. It supports me to transcend and transform fear and judgement, and grasp the beauty of human needs as the frame which will provide me with the clearest and most life-giving understanding of why people (me/you) do what we do. All of which opens the door to connection, which, in an age of fear and separation, brings hope. **[Laura]**

... In the past week I've both heard a woman preach the best sermon I've heard this year, and happened to talk with several female friends who each spoke of the ways - often brutal - in which people have tried to prevent them from preaching. My friends' stories about being mocked and silenced when they sought to preach put me in mind of 'Jeremiah's Complaint'. I tried to imagine how Huldah [the (female) prophet whom King Josiah consulted when he rediscovered the Book of the Law (2Ki 22:3-20)] might have described her own 'daring greatly', her struggles to find the courage to follow God.

Huldah's Complaint (after Jer 20:7-18)

Burning.

Blood boiling.

Bones roasting.

How can unsaid words be so

Incendiary?

You fooled me God.

Seduced me and subdued me when

I saw your splendour

Blazing bright. When

An ember from your altar

Blistered my lips. When

You kindled a spark

Within me. When

You said "Speak!"

Were you laughing then, God?

They are now.

Barbs fly; fists too.

Vitriol and violence drive me to

Silence.

... I see your promise, God

Blazing tongues poured out

All flesh flame-baptised

²⁰ <http://sharedspace.org.uk/>

Slaves, men and maids,
Fire-filled indifferently.

When the fire comes
And the daughters and sons
Will prophesy there
Will they then hear from her?

Or must she wait till fire falls once more?

[Steve]

... **what does 'spirituality' mean to those who seek to follow Jesus?** And more specifically 'courageous spirituality', which in the contemporary usage of the word seems like a contradiction?

... it will be **substantial**

... it will be **authentic**

... it will be **intentional**

... it will be **creative**

... it will be **passionate**

and here's the crunch - it will be **courageous**, or vulnerable.

'Seeing we have a cross at the heart of our faith, it is stupid to ignore the reality of suffering, or pretend there is some escape from it. We need a faith that will stand strong in the presence of pain, and not run from it.' **[Geoff]**

... **it was with some surprise that I discovered**, from the writings of one of our younger ministers that I am not a historian, I am also history. She has been writing a dissertation for her degree examining women in ministry and attitudes to this in Baptist life.

... and she talks in her work about me and several others of my cohort in ministry, of some of the things we did, some of the arguments we had, some of the changes we inaugurated and some of the possibilities we opened up. We did not think of ourselves as doing anything particularly important or special. We were doing what was in front of us; responding, with as much faith and integrity as we could, as much wisdom as we could summon, and sometimes with tears and laughter, to the situations that we were in.

And now, somebody else telling the story is telling a story of people who dared greatly and changed things, whose great daring made a difference... I have thought of myself as somebody who hasn't really dared much; who has been greatly attracted by this theme, but also deeply rebuked by it, in comparison with the people who really did things, went out on a limb and made a difference.

Maybe daring greatly is to do with faithfully and with integrity and hope, living who we are, and letting God do whatever it is that God wants to do through it – without being too anxious about what that might be. **[Ruth]**

... I believe God was calling me into ministry many, many years ago but I did not recognise this and ignored it. Me? A minister? I'm Deaf! About ten years ago for the first time, I visited a 'deaf church' led by deaf, where services were in British Sign Language (BSL). What an impact that made on me... I allowed myself to open the door a tiny crack, that was my calling into ministry.

I trusted God to give me the strength and courage needed to follow his path, and with wonderful support from the students and tutors, I finally graduated from Northern Baptist College with a theology degree.

I have learnt so much from both hearing and deaf. I feel God is calling me to minister both to the hearing and deaf communities and to work to bring the two groups together in mutual respect. My ministry has given me the opportunity to explore the riches of both worlds and to bring them together. It is rare that God leads us down to easy paths but he does give us his strength and courage to persevere. *[Susan]*

... Violent extremism is now arguably the greatest threat to people across the world. It includes terrorism and violent acts, which could seemingly be committed anywhere and anytime... what does it mean to follow Jesus in this context?

Some thoughts:

be incarnational in our discipleship

reject and challenge violent extremism from any quarter

assert the equality of all human life as 'made in the image of God'. To destroy human life is always wrong.

advocate the centrality of the love of God for all, expressed in Christ

build relationships with people of all faiths and none, loving our neighbours

use language and promote the use of language that clearly distinguishes between faith/religion and violent extremism

opt for relating positively to the young, creating and supporting opportunities for inter faith encounters and relationships

In a world that seems to be more complex and dangerous, will we resist retreating into our churches and follow Jesus in the complexity and messiness of the world? Courage is needed to dare greatly, to follow Jesus by working to transform violent extremism through inter faith relating. *[Andy]*

Many thanks to Howard Jones, Simon Hall, Judy Howard, Rupert Lazar, Laura Gill, Steve Holmes, Joshua Searle, Sandra Crawford, Geoff Colmer, Ruth Gouldbourne, Barbara Carpenter, Phil Jump, Stuart Blythe, Carmel Murphy, Susan Myatt, Andy Williams, Charmaine Howard and David Mayne.

