

REAL LIFE: THE REASON WHY

It was a dark winter Sunday evening in Suffolk and I was standing at an upstairs window of the church where I was first a Minister. I had been there perhaps a year or so, no longer.

It was a special Sunday evening service: we had a visiting Male Voice Choir. The congregation were gathering downstairs in the church. The Choir were warming up in the Choir Vestry, all except for one man who had asked if he could use “the facilities.” Now the only “facility” in that part of the church was upstairs, leading off the Minister’s Vestry so I took him up there, then waited at the landing window to bring him down again.

As I looked out on the darkness outside all of a sudden, without any warning at all, every single light in the church building went out and stayed out. It was pitch black. The minutes ticked by as I waited for someone to come and tell me what to do. Then it dawned on me with awful clarity- I was the Minister of that church. Everyone was waiting for me to tell them what to do: the two hundred or so members of the congregation sitting in the church; the thirty-odd members of the Male Voice Choir downstairs, not to mention that one poor soul who was stuck in the last place you would wish to be stuck when all the lights go out. These people were my responsibility. I must make the decision.

The horror of that moment I shall never forget. It was like finally realising that I was grown up, with a grown-up person’s job and a grown-up person’s responsibilities and I had to get on with it.

(Just to finish the story for you- I did get the unfortunate singer safely out of the facilities and I reassured the congregation. The choir, being good Christian men settled down in the vestry to hold a prayer meeting, one of the visitors to the church turned out to be the caretaker of the Town Hall opposite, so she opened up the hall, we all moved over there for the service and the Choir were delighted, seeing this as a direct answer to their prayers because they never thought they would have the honour of singing in the Town Hall and did not God move in mysterious ways? Yeah....)

But that moment- the moment of realising that you have responsibilities; that you are finally and absolutely “grown-up”- I should think it happens to most of us in some way or other and once you have reached that point, you can never go back. No matter how much you sigh at the thought of being a child again, with nothing to worry about other than your own pleasure, you cannot go back and deep down you would not want to go back even if you could. You have moved on.

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I was thinking about Moses: how he stood and argued with God at the burning bush- *I can’t do this job; no-one will take any notice of me; I don’t know what to say; why can’t someone else do it?* Admittedly he was being presented with a huge challenge which most people would run from: persuading a powerful, ruthless Emperor to let his slave labour-force leave the country; then getting this huge group of slaves, who had never been used to organising themselves in the slightest, across a vast desert; then getting them into a new country which was, incidentally, already inhabited by a lot of other people. It is not a project to which any of us would say “*yes of course, no problem.*” Is it?

But I suspect that Moses had already reached the point of no return some time previously. Through his childhood he had lived as an Egyptian prince, pampered and

And God gives us the ultimate opportunities to channel our strengths and even our weaknesses; to channel our love and even our fear into the living, working faith of Jesus Christ: faith which set out to enable the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to dance, the poor to have hope, the heavy burdened to be set free, and the world reconciled to God. God does not enfeeble us by allowing us to opt out of life; to withdraw into a totally selfish and sheltered existence. He does not want to see us reverting to childishness because, once we have grown up, we will only revert at great cost and serious personal damage.

William Barclay wrote of a man visiting a friend of his who had been having a terrible time in life. *Suffering colours all of your life, doesn't it*, said the man. And he was right. Seriously bad times do have a permanent effect on us. *Yes*, said the sufferer, *this suffering will colour all of my life but I propose to choose which colour.*

Faith is about getting to choose the colour.

We live a world full of pain and evil. Sooner or later we become aware of this and sooner or later the pain and the evil impinge upon our own lives. And the hurt and the anger and the frustration we feel will colour all of our lives.

But God offers us a choice of colour.

The blackness of disbelief and despair, which leaves us wondering why we bother to keep living?

Or the brightness of faith, which stands us beside God in the fight against pain and evil and gives us the reason why?

Amen.