

MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN: THE HERO INSIDE

The second “Shrek” film opens with the handsome Prince Charming riding to rescue the beautiful princess who is imprisoned at the top of a tall tower. The Prince scales mountains and crosses rivers; he journeys through fire and snow; he reaches the castle and climbs to the top of the tallest tower. He enters the Princess’ room, pulls aside the curtain around her bed and sees..... a wolf, dressed up as Little Red Riding Hood’s grandmother, comfortably reading a novel. “*Where’s the Princess?*” “*She’s already been rescued,*” says the Wolf. “*She’s gone on her honeymoon.*” Now a truly heroic Prince, who wanted more than anything else to see the Princess free and happy, might have been glad at this piece of news but this Prince is not. He wanted to be the one to rescue the Princess. He wanted the fame and the glory (and the financial reward). He throws a tantrum, runs home to his mother and sulks.

It was Shrek, the ogre, who had rescued the princess and as the first film begins, he is not exactly a hero either. He is lonely, morose and apathetic. He cares nothing for anyone or anything and just wants to be left alone to live his own life. He rescues the Princess only because the King has seized his land, and is refusing to give it back unless Shrek takes up this quest. Grudgingly and most un-heroically, he sets out.

What is it then that makes a true hero?

It is being fired up by a cause, a love, a passion that is greater than yourself; setting aside what you want for the sake of the greater good. It is about commitment, loyalty, love and self-sacrifice. It is about being inspired by high ideals and living up to them. So neither Shrek nor Prince Charming, being motivated by self-interest, were heroes.

Christianity is, ideally, about heroism. It is about being fired up by a greater power than your own; it is about giving your life to the service of God; it is about commitment, loyalty, love and self-sacrifice. But it does not always work like that. If you trawl through the pages of church history or even your own memories you will find people like Prince Charming who did great things for the church and in the cause of Christianity but who wanted the fame and the glory and most of all the power and who sulked magnificently or stirred up trouble when they did not get it. And you will find people like Shrek who went along with Christianity because they did not have much choice or because they thought it might offer them a more comfortable life or because their parents pushed them into it. Not what you might call “heroic.”

But that famous song, “Look for the hero inside yourself,” insists that there is a hero inside every one of us and that once we find it, we will find the key to our “selves” and to our lives. We will learn what we were put on this earth for. We will find something worth getting out of bed for in the morning. We will unleash all the greatest and the best in ourselves. And this was what Jesus promised to all who committed their lives to him- that they would find a divinity inside themselves, the power and the very nature of God. They would be the people to transform the world. We are called to be heroes.

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It is not that easy though, is it? The single most crucial quality in a hero has to be motivation. If a hero is truly inspired by a cause greater than himself, then there will no limit to what he can do; no limit to what he is prepared to give. We have known

And this, I think, is what the United Reformed Church Programme-Vision4Life- is aiming to achieve. It is not, like many other programmes in the past, about doing something different, doing something more, doing something which the denomination thinks is a good idea but you cannot see the point. It is not really about doing at all. It is about re-visiting what is going on inside us. It is about encouraging those tiny sparks of faith, those faint longings that we cannot explain but which bring us here-encouraging them into a vibrant, motivating religion. It is about finding a reason, other than habit, to keep our churches open. It is about re-discovering a passion for something far greater than ourselves that will take us out of ourselves and give us new energy and power. It is not about becoming crashing bores or dangerous brain-washers. It is about becoming as Jesus was- so filled with love, with inner strength, with spiritual power, that people will come to us as they came to him, because they see a quality of life and a heroism they want to share in

Because people do still want God; they do still crave a sense of meaning and worth in life; they do still want healing and holding; they do still want forgiveness. Nothing much has changed since Jesus looked at all those people who were *harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd* and told his disciples to gather them together, to feed them with the bread of life, bind up their wounds and create a community. We need to look, as Jesus looked on the world, with love. And rather than promptly sink into depression, feeling totally overwhelmed by all that is wrong, we are called to find the hero inside, the child of God who, in God's strength, can achieve great things.

Vision4Life then, is firstly about rediscovering the Bible as the Word of God to inspire and guide us; secondly about rediscovering prayer as a means of power and inner strength; and only after a year spent focussing on each of these two do we move to the final part which is rediscovering mission as the focal point of our church life and worship. It is not about lots of extra meetings but about creating a stronger focus for those we already have. It is not about adding yet more duties to your list but about finding fresh inspiration for what you are already doing.

Remember the legends of the Knights of the Round Table? Before setting out on their heroic quests they would place their sword on the altar of God and spend the night kneeling before the altar in prayer. They opened themselves to the power and guidance of God because without the spirit of God within them they would achieve no truly great or heroic deeds.

So if, after our Church Meeting discussions today and in July, we decide to follow the Vision4Life programme, this is how I see it: a time to focus on the power of God and on the call of Jesus Christ, to kneel before the God renewing our courage and commitment, to find the "hero inside ourselves" and the key to our life.

So be it. Amen.