

### **“A Word that Travels”**

There's this travel show I like to watch on Netflix, it's a show called Departures and it has these two young guys and they travel all over the world exploring and learning about different countries and cultures.

And I find it really interesting because I get to see a lot of different parts of the world, cultural practices that I might never otherwise get to experience first hand.

One of the points that these two guys frequently make is that there is a big difference between traveling and going on vacation. Sometimes people come up to them and say stuff like wow, it must be really amazing to just quit your job and go on vacation for a year.

And what they try to explain is that going on vacation is different because it's about escape. It's about getting away from something, where as travel is about moving towards something, it's about finding new ways of experiencing the world, and expanding our perspectives of what's possible.

Perspective matters.

And I think this kind of differentiation can be helpful as we read the bible too, because sometimes when I read the bible, and I hear these rich and fascinating stories about Jesus and the early church, it can feel to me a bit like a vacation, like an escape from reality.

You know that tag line they use for Las Vegas, “whatever happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas”. It can sort feel a bit like that because, “What ever happens in the bible, usually seems to stay in the bible”.

So, while miracles, and resurrection, and churches where everyone shares and takes care of one another are amazing to think about, it's sometimes hard to see how those stories fit with the world that we're actually living in.

In our first reading this morning from the book of Acts, we hear a brief but important account of the early church.

We are told that, “the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common...for as many as owned lands or houses sold them as needed and brought the proceeds of what was sold to the feet of the apostles, so that there wasn't a needy person among them”.

It's a vision of the church which reveals a community of believers, trying to live out the greatest commands of their Lord.

For when a scribe came to Jesus asking him, “Which commandment is the first of all?”<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The first is this, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;’<sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’<sup>31</sup> The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28-31).

So, when we hear an account of the early church where we are told that the people were all of one heart and one soul, as the first commandment instructs.

And where each shared with their neighbour as they would with themselves as the second commandment instructs.

And then we say to ourselves, well that's just not very realistic, or that way of doing things doesn't fit very well in the real world.

Then we may be justified in asking ourselves whether it is the gospel that doesn't conform very well to the real world, or whether we are simply unwilling to conform our lives to the teachings of the gospel, and the commandments of our Lord.

If our knee jerk reaction is to dismiss first and ask questions later. Then what begins to happen very quickly, is we close our minds off to the possibility that these gospels and these witness accounts, are actually Holy.

That our sacred texts are as the Apostle Paul teaches us, inspired by God as a means of guiding His church and expanding our vision, that Christ is present in these narratives to guide us from death to new life, to guide our way from where we are now, to the place that God is calling us to be.

And so, perspective matters.

There is a story I know that I want to share with you. There was a woman from the West who's training was in cultural anthropology.

And she goes on "vacation" to Central Africa, but while she's there, she leaves the comfort of her hotel and she goes with a guide to visit a tribal village in the country.

And after she look around a bit and gets a bit more comfortable in this unfamiliar place she decides to conduct a social experiment with some of the children in the village. (People do the strangest things on vacation).

Anyways, she takes a box of sweets and places them at the base of a tree just outside the village and then she gathers a group of the local children and she lines them all up facing the tree.

And she tells them that when she says go, they should all run to the tree, and who ever gets there first, will get the entire box of treats all for themselves.

And so, the kids are all lined, and she lets them go, but as they begin to run, she notices the children do something very unexpected.

Instead of all the kids racing off towards the tree as fast as they can, some of the children started linking arms with one another, some of the older children started slowing down and going back to take the hands of the younger ones.

And as they stumbled, and played, and made their way towards the tree, they're encouraging one another, until finally they all made it to the tree together.

When they get there, they sit down and happily share the treats among themselves, until the whole box was gone.

When the anthropologist saw what had occurred, she decided to approach the oldest boy, one of the strongest of bunch, and she asked him why he didn't just run ahead and win the treats for himself.

The child replied in his native language: Ubuntu. Meaning "How can one of us be happy, if the others are sad?"<sup>1</sup>

Ubuntu.

It's a Bantu word, and it's often used to describe the phenomenon of elephant herds turning back to aid and protect one of their own who becomes lost or falls behind.

And in South Africa, in the years following the apartheid, this same word became an important symbol of the country's post-apartheid social philosophy.

It was popularized by the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, as a sort of North Star, as a guiding principle for the nation as they worked together towards a non-violent process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

A way much needed in that country again today.

Like our reading today from Acts, Ubuntu is an idea that challenges our glorification of the self-sufficient human-being.

Proclaiming instead, that all people are essentially inter-dependent. Only becoming, who we are fully capable of being, through our relationships with one another.

Ubuntu says, "I am who I am, because of who we are. I need to help you to become fully you, so that I can become fully me".<sup>2</sup>

It is a beautiful concept, a transformative concept, and it is a gospel concept.

And so, in this season of Easter, as we begin to see the signs of and new life springing up all around us, as we experience the resurrection of Jesus in our own lives and witness His presence in the lives of one another. Let us be of one heart and one mind, so that where ever the Spirit leads us, we will go there together, for Christ is risen in this body, and His peace is with us always. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sjEXDMqJbM>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wZtfqZ271w>