

Leader's Address at the Service of Dedication January 2005

Hebrews 11: 8-10; 32 and 39

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is a chapter about great adventures of faith of people from the Old Testament. But, as verse 39 says, "Yet all these though they were commended for their faith did not receive what was promised". And that promise was Jesus Christ. What is being said is that there are more and better things to come.

The text is also saying that there are endless things to be said about these adventures of faith. 'And what more should I say for time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets'.

And this echoes for me the last verse of John's Gospel: "But there are also many things that Jesus did; if every one were written down I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that could be written".

Ray Davey started the Corrymeela adventure of faith. As we near the 40th anniversary of the founding of Corrymeela, we should be profoundly grateful to God and Ray. All of us, in Gill Michael's words at the AGM have been given "spaces for adventure" and all of us could tell stories that "the world itself could not contain the books that could be written" and time would certainly fail us. So let us be grateful for the great spaces for adventure we have been given.

And of course adventure stories are to be added to. That is what the Hebrews text is saying. There are more adventures to be had. We are not stuck in old stories endlessly repeated. This is a journey. This is an adventure story to be continued as the story books say.

Ray writes about the first Corrymeela event as follows:

"In June 1965 a group of some 40-50 people entered the lounge at Corrymeela. It was a Saturday afternoon and the purchase of the premises had just been completed. This meeting had been called to express our gratitude and also to dedicate ourselves and the house to the work of Christian reconciliation throughout the country. It was not a very impressive event and perhaps a little self-conscious, as even then we stressed informality and also none of us were at all sure how it would all work out. This was indeed the very first Corrymeela event and somehow it almost took us by surprise, as the building itself was undergoing some long overdue renovations, and much obviously needed to be done before it would be fully functional. If I remember rightly I don't think there were even enough chairs to go round and some had to stand. I mention this because it seemed so much a non-event with no press and no television coverage. Yet it was a first step and something had happened".

I think that this points to the paradoxical importance of non-events, at least as the world understands them. The birth, life and death of Jesus Christ – the promise that the Hebrews text looks to – was a non-event in an obscure part of the Roman Empire. One routine crucifixion of absolutely no significance. Yet the knowledge of the Pure Victim, Jesus Christ, journeys through space and time and the knowledge of our victims becomes central to our western culture. So the foundation of Corrymeela was an absolute non-event. Yet the language of reconciliation and relationships has become central in Northern Ireland.

Who can tell me where the following quotation comes from?

“This community has been deeply divided and has suffered much in social and economic terms from the prolonged conflict. There is much to be done to create a society in which mutual respect for the rights and equality of all our citizens and in which mutual trust can grow. There is need to build a calm regard for our distinct and sometimes conflicting cultural traditions and to respect the diversity of our people”.

This is the DUP’s statement in Annex E to the Proposals by the British and Irish Governments for a Comprehensive Agreement.

Can it be that the language of reconciliation will soon be on the lips of the DUP?

There are, however, another set of despisers. The leader article of Fortnight for October 2004 had the following

“Lets forget any fanciful notion that the desired or remotely possible outcome of current negotiations is respect and affection between Adams and Paisley, Robinson and McGuinness. These are Corrymeela dreams”.

As Ray has taught us, never underestimate the power of dreams and visions.

So let us celebrate the non-event of our founding, the insignificance of our dreams and the non-event of our 40th anniversary. Let us give thanks to God and to Ray. And may we journey on, and in the words of W.H. Auden “see rare beasts and have unique adventures”.

David Stevens