

Along the track

Our Image of God

Sir Ken Robinson was an extraordinary educationalist – a recognised authority on creativity in education and a great storyteller. Among his many stories he included this one. A little girl was in a drawing lesson, she was six and she was at the back, drawing, and the teacher said this little girl hardly paid attention, and in this drawing lesson she did. The teacher was fascinated, and she went over and asked, “What are you drawing?” and the girl said, “I’m drawing a picture of God.” The teacher said, “But nobody knows what God looks like.” And the girl said, “They will in a minute.”

What sort of image do you have of God?

When my father died way back in 1975, I organised that a new and very popular image of Jesus be the one for his memorial card. It did not go down well. It may have resonated with me, the youngest in the family, but not with the others. A more traditional image was called for. We all have a different image of what God may mean, what Jesus might look like too, I suspect so what is yours? What sort of image do we pass on to our children?

People have been trying to imagine what God might be like for thousands of years, what Jesus, the Word of God, the one who expresses what God is like in the flesh might look like. Great artists have produced masterpieces and churches all over the world have magnificent murals. God is very often portrayed as an old man creating, or judging from a throne, the lawgiver on the mountain.

Sometimes over the centuries people used stories to try to explain what God is like, what our relationship with God is like, even a rather strange one in Genesis where Jacob wrestles with God: Jacob was a very determined man; some would consider him to be ruthless. He was a liar, and a manipulator. In fact, the name Jacob not only means “deceiver,” but more literally it means “grabber.”

After years away from home where he fled in fear of his life, he decides to take his chances and go home and face his brother Esau.

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford in the river at Jabbok.

After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

When the man saw that he could not overpower Jacob, he hit the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was dislocated. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel because you have struggled with God (for that is who the stranger was) and you have overcome.”

Strange story isn’t it! Jacob wrestling with this stranger who turns out to be God!! It is really a story which describes Jacob’s life journey which leaves him struggling with God, wrestling with belief and understanding.

Jacob was not a religious man, in fact, Jacob was very much concerned with Jacob, but this story describes a very key moment in his life, in his faith journey.

It is at a critical time where he must face himself, a time when he has to be honest with himself and who he is before God. It is a story that looks over Jacob’s shoulder at us too – we are included in this story.

The story recognises that we too struggle with belief in God at times.

There are times we can feel very close to God, very secure in our relationship, but sometimes we are confronted by tough questions:

- How could God allow that to happen?
- Why is this happening to me or to so and so?
- Some of us may struggle with beliefs that once seemed so secure – and we now come to question them.

In the words of St Paul:

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 1 Cor: 13 11-12

If we still have childish images of God, belief or faith can look irrelevant or childish. If we don’t have an image that corresponds to our stage in life, we run the risk of not allowing God to accompany us at this particular stage in our lives. We need an image of God that sustains us in the good times and in the difficult times.

Regards
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