



DOWN TO EARTH....

4 - MAY 2012

MONOPOLIES OF VIRTUE?

In sharing the vision of “Down to Earth through regional events and road-shows, one of the questions we have been asking is “what does it mean to be Good News?” The underlying message is simple; by seeking to do good; to make our communities, neighbourhoods, workplaces or just about anywhere else we find ourselves better places, we are becoming *proclaimers of Good News*. The Gospel is of course more than Jesus calling us to engage with the world and seek to make everyone feel better, but if we do not have a reputation as *Good News* people, others are unlikely to consider that we have anything else within our faith story that can be described in such terms.

Many people have found this a helpful starting point in considering how they might yet discover themselves to be evangelists. Most of us feel far more confident making a cup of tea for a distressed neighbour, or doing a favour for a work colleague, than giving an account of the key principles of our Gospel faith.

Yet one of the concerns I hear expressed is that there are lots of other people around who do good too. How can we stand out as Christians, if people of other faiths or none are also making a positive contribution to the community around us? I am sure it is not what they intend, but sometimes as people share thoughts like this, they appear to almost suggest that it is simply out of order for anyone to be a nice person if they are not a Christian. But do Christians need to have a monopoly on goodness and virtue in order for us to be an effective *good news* people? I do not believe that we do; in fact rather than seeing them as a threat, I wonder if we can learn to see the good deeds of others as a real opportunity.

I am less concerned about the number of people out there who *are* good news, than I am about the number of Christians who *aren't*. How might our perspectives change if instead of instinctively seeing such people as a competitor, we saw them as potential allies. After all wasn't it Jesus who responded to His disciples,

concerned that others were seeking to do good in His name, by declaring, “*anyone who is not against us is for us?*”

One of our churches recently decided to develop some work on a nearby estate as part of their bi-centenary celebrations. They engaged with the community in an open-handed way, and asked if there were ways that they could help make the neighbourhood a better place. The response they received surprised them. A woman from the community had left some years earlier to open an orphanage in Africa; many of the locals had agreed to support her, but with time they had diminished in number. One community activist suggested that the best thing the church could do was help them raise the necessary funds to keep the project running. The church had the good sense and grace to respond positively, and a few months later she was describing them as “*one of the best things that ever happened around here*”. By coming alongside, supporting and affirming local people who in their own way were seeking to be *good news*, a local church was able to establish a presence and a reputation, creating an effective platform from which to further share the love and message of Jesus.

How many of us struggle to find the personnel and resources to offer the kind of care and activities in our communities that we would really like to. Perhaps we need to learn that rather than seeing everything as something we should do, part of our ministry could be to seek out and support those within the neighbourhood with similar aspirations. As we share together in common purpose, how many more opportunities might emerge to share with them and others the underlying message and values that define us? In a world that often perceives and experiences the Church as being critical and condemning, how different might it be if our opening line was “*we think what you is doing is great, is there any way we can support and help you?*”

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BUGB President Chris Duffet's invitation to get involved in

BIG HEARTED EVANGELISM

Comes to NWBA 10th-13th Jan 2013

