

Kingdom People, Big Questions: Why

The Personal Perspective

I have a friend: he has been a faithful Christian most of his life. He has faithfully served in many different ways over the years, sought to follow Jesus as best he could, the way he has been taught; he has done many things, but has serious doubts about the actual difference he has made in this world; he has taken part in many church activities, but struggles to see how most of them serve to build the Kingdom of God.

I have another friend: brought up in a Christian family, the son of a church leader, served as an integral part of several evangelical churches, listened on a regular basis to some of the best preaching of the time; but he encountered things which did not fit the teaching and the worldview he had been brought up with; he started to ask questions which the members of his Christian community were unable to answer and which, it became clear, he was not supposed to ask; he started to see inconsistencies between the message being preached about fulness of life and joy and purpose and the actual experience of the people around him, mostly just struggling in all the usual ways; he could not reconcile all these conflicts and hold onto belief in what appeared to be empty words; he no longer calls himself a Christian, but neither can he bring himself to fully embrace the empty secularism of our society.

And there are many others: friends, acquaintances, and passing contacts; I have listened to them, talked with them, sought to help them in various ways. Over and over again, I have spoken with individuals (including church leaders, church members, those who have left the church, and those who have never belonged to one) and been told they have nowhere to turn, that our current systems and structures are not meeting their needs.

What they have in common is that they feel isolated; they are looking for someone who will listen to them and not tell them they are wrong for feeling the way they do; they are looking for someone who will not tell them the answer is to pray more, read the Bible more and trust God more. They appreciate the time I can give them, but I don't have either the capacity or the wisdom to offer them what they need.

What they need is a community where people don't all agree, but this is regarded as a strength rather than a problem; a community which accepts them just the way they are, and encourages them to grow in the ways they care about; a community where they will not be criticised or judged for asking honest questions; a community which encourages honesty and critical thought; a community which offers feedback on their ideas and a variety of perspectives on the resources available, to help them make informed choices.

And they need a community which encourages everyone to connect their principles with their lifestyle, to live in a way which has personal integrity, and to help make the world a better place for everybody – to create a healthy, sustainable environment for us all.

The Social Perspective

It seems unlikely that previous generations of politicians had better connections with the people, or had their interests more at heart, than the current generation, but we are more aware of what they do and say, we watch the speeches and interviews, hear the press statements and the resulting commentary and analysis from all sides; we constantly hear our politicians promising, and we constantly see the failures and reversals. It appears that democracy is failing, and we have nothing to replace it with.

We may not have liked or trusted previous generations of politicians, but at least they appeared to be competent. Perhaps, again, it is because we see and hear them far more, and perhaps previous politicians operated in more stable times so they had a better grasp of what needed to be done.

Many of us no longer trust or respect our elected leaders: all politicians are now a mistrusted 'them'; even the opposition is part of 'the establishment'. But when we reject all politicians we have nobody to turn to other than self-appointed prophets promising us economic salvation if we will only trust them, or to outsiders who seek to demolish large parts of 'the system'.

We no longer expect our leaders to tell the truth and the public media is full of stories which are often partial and distorted accounts, which leaves us susceptible to conspiracy theories. And the public media is mostly commercial, existing in order to generate a profit rather than communicate the truth, so we listen to social media rumours instead.

The mainstream economists tell us that our only hope lies in ever greater levels of production and consumption, while we know that the planet cannot sustain even our current activity, that our current levels of greed and wastefulness are poisoning the environment and destroying the ecosystems on which our survival depends.

Within our society, there are higher levels of anger and fear than at any time in recorded history. There were record levels of family breakdown before Brexit drove many families apart, and there are no signs those wounds have begun to heal. And along with the anger, fear, isolation and uncertainty, many people feel that they are un-heard and impotent.

The world seems to be increasingly divided, dangerous and unpredictable. There are only a few basic responses available to us. We can selfishly work to secure for ourselves and our immediate family what power and resources we can grab. We can opt out of engagement with the current problems, hoping that other people will manage to solve them, or looking for things to be better in the next world. We can try as isolated individuals to do our little bit, in the hope that it will be enough.

Or we can play our part in seeking real solutions; understanding, promoting and seeking to implement them alongside others who are prepared to act in faith that through love and cooperation the world can be made a better place.

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