

Offering welcome, telling the story, listening anew

What a difference a year makes.

This time last year I was in the middle of packing up the contents of my house. Boxes were accumulating, the charity shops were doing well from my bookshelves, and I was gritting my teeth at the thought of life without a dishwasher.

After a year here, normality has resumed and as usual my house looks a little like a bomb has hit it, the cat is ensconced on the sofa, and I have got used to having to wash up again.

Learning to be in a new community means that I have had to listen anew to the stories of this place. I saw on Twitter the other week a quote from Ivan Illich, which ends like this:

“If you want to change a society then you have to tell an alternative story.”

It made me think about the stories that we tell. Do we tell the story that Jesus gives us, the alternative story? The story of an upside down world where the last are first, the marginalised are seen, the oppressed set free. The story that enables each of us to find our place in the jigsaw of the kingdom of heaven.

Another photo from Facebook showed me how persuasive that story is: the Welcome from Coventry Cathedral. The all-inclusiveness of that welcome is straight from the gospels, from the picture of Jesus that I recognise, and when I shared it I found that friends of all faiths and none liked it, loved it and commented on it. Some of them recognised that if they had experienced that Jesus then they may have made different life and faith decisions. We have a huge responsibility to offer that welcome, to tell the story, and allow other people to tell their stories. The overall responsibility may be God's but we have our part to play.

Lent is late this year and, in the parlance of Godly Play, it means we have a 'growing season' between Candlemas at the beginning of February and Ash Wednesday at the beginning of March. Why not think about your God story over this time, and see where Jesus' alternative story intersects with yours.

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