

Reflections from a Community & Church activist

in the pack for 'Practical Impact' CUF's 2011 conference, 6/4/11

Andy Dorton came to Hull as a student and hasn't left since. Since the late 1980's, he has made his home, along with his wife and two kids, in Hull's outer most city estate, North Bransholme. He has previously worked as a social worker and homeless hostel manager. He is the Church Urban Fund link officer for the Diocese of York, the Church of England's Social Responsibility Officer for Hull and the East Riding, chair of Hull Youth for Christ and a Trustee for Church Urban Fund.

All sorts of people are motivated by all sorts of things and Christians don't have a monopoly on 'good' motivations. Our motivations may be just as mixed, just as much of a grey area as anyone else's may be. They may be as altruistic and as selfish, they may arise from 'higher things' and pure practicality. They may lead to great fulfilment and they may lead to disappointment and probably all shades of both in between.

But in the end, and preferably somewhere near the start as well, I am responsible for what motivates me, not anyone else, me. And what motivates me to be here and to do what I do is the gospel which is the good news of Jesus which is that he came to start a body which would take him to the ends of the earth and demonstrate the present and still coming reign of God so that people, especially those who know they need to turn around and live in a new way, will get the chance to do just that.

*I believe that Jesus came to show us how to live well **and** how to unmask and effectively resist evil... and not just to die.*

So I read the gospel and I look for the end of my earth. I have to interpret what I think 'ends of the earth' means in this context, this is not Galilee and it is not Jerusalem. Its middle-class sub-urban England (when I started the journey). My earth became Hull and I eventually (1994) got to the edge of it, North Bransholme. This is what the gospel requires of me; this gospel becomes my motivation. This doesn't make me better. It doesn't necessarily make my action distinctive i.e. others may do the same for other reasons. But it is why I'm here and it is 'Christian'.

Around here, and for many of the people that I know who are beautifully Jesus to the world around them, working in various parts of Hull, through various 'ministries', both official and unofficial, apparently secular or overtly 'Christian', it is very difficult. Difficult to see people you come to care about, even love, damage themselves, damage other people, leave, turn back around again, die sometimes, never really escape from the old life, old habits, being taken advantage of, the external and internalised domination systems, and so on to another generation.

I haven't suffered personally; under 10% of my income is spent on a mortgage and so my partner not having to work isn't a sacrifice; a rubbish school where our kids were gold-dust isn't a sacrifice either! Watching suffering is the suffering; being seemingly powerless to change things (people did pray hard, honest), that is very painful.

And it isn't all true. Things have changed, people have changed and powers have been resisted... or at least preached to. But the reign of God is a long time coming and I'm getting older and tired. And I know that goes for many Christians I associate and work with in Hull.

We are pressed down, but not destroyed. Like I said, Jesus didn't come to die, he came to show us how to live.

I have seen wrecked people who have forgotten more about having a good time than I've ever known. I'm surrounded by people for whom the cares of the world are so much more pressing than my cares, but yet can have a good time, who can let tomorrow take care of itself, who give no thought to how they will eat or clothe themselves.

They remind me that this is paradise. I am in paradise now. Not then, not later, not when I die, but now. I have moved from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and this is where I now live. Very badly, but that's my problem, that I can't live fully in the joy of that. It doesn't change the truth though; love overcame death and cast out fear. The truth is, I'm in paradise now. This is a wonderful world, messed up as it may be. Heaven won't be better than this. So I'm trying to make the most of it. We try to not protect ourselves too much; not to be slaves again to fear. I am very sad, but I am very happy.

Andy would love to hear from you andrew@dorton.karoo.co.uk