

Worship development

Starter: [In pairs]

Which poem(s) or poet(s) would you recommend to a friend? Why?

Poetry

A.S.J. TESSIMOND

*When I first met you I knew I had come at last
home,
Home after wandering, home after long puzzled
searching,
Home after long being wind-borne, wave-tossed,
night-caught,
Long being lost;
And being with you as normal and needful and
natural
As sleeping or waking; and I was myself, who had
never
been wholly myself; I was walking and talking and
laughing
Easily at last;
And the air was softer and sounds were sharper
And colours were brighter and the sky was higher
And length was not measured by milestones and
time was not measured by clocks....
And this end was a beginning...
And these words are the beginning of my thanks.*

R.S. THOMAS, 'The Kingdom'

*It's a long way off but inside it
There are quite different things going on:
Festivals at which the poor man
Is king and the consumptive is
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
At themselves and love looks at them
Back; and industry is for mending
The bent bones and the minds fractured
By life. It's a long way off, but to get
There takes no time and admission
Is free, if you will purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with
Your need only and the simple offering
Of your faith, green as a leaf.*

PABLO NERUDA

*I want to do with you what Spring does with
the Cherry trees*

7. Poetry

*Read aloud, then allow time for everyone to
re-read the texts for themselves along with
the comment and the personal focus
questions – and reflect alone.*

Comment:

Samuel Taylor Coleridge held fast to his belief in the powers of imagination, which he experienced as being capable of leading humanity to Truth. Similarly Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry*, got to the heart of the matter when he wrote that 'A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.' Poetry opens up truth within us. In the film 'Dead Poets Society', Robin Williams plays Mr Keating, a gifted teacher of English whose unorthodox methods unlock this living imaginative soul of poetry for his pupils. Quoting Walt Whitman, Mr Keating says: 'The powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse – what will your verse be?...we don't read and write poetry because it's cute; we read and write poetry because we are members of the human race, and the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, Law, Business, Engineering, these are noble pursuits necessary to sustain life. Poetry, beauty, romance, love – these are what we stay alive for.' Poetry engages with the essence of what it is to be human. And because it operates through the imagination, poetry opens us to God in an especially powerful and creative way.

Personal Focus Questions:

1. How does the poem by Tessimond speak to you? What thoughts and feelings does it engender within you?
2. In what ways does R.S. Thomas's poem inspire you. What does it make you want to change as a result?
3. If Pablo Neruda's words encapsulate God's desire for you, how does that make you feel? And what might your discipleship look like if above all else you wanted to embody this truth for others?

*Share together in threes the results of your
individual reflection.*

When you have finished your discussions, return together as a group and share any insights. Now share together in these applications.

Applications:

1. What key things can we learn from our experience of poetry about leading an act of worship well?
2. Choose a poem and construct a reflective segment of worship around it. [hint: the psalms lend themselves to this type of deep use, so you could try one of these first]
3. Write a prayer around the central image of God as the poet of salvation.

Review (*Individual thought*)

As an individual how will you use the ideas you have heard in this session?

Follow up

If you would like to develop these ideas further then you could organize a workshop with Rev Dr Jonathan Hustler (01507 522235)

Worship

End with a time of worship that focuses on us as God's imaginative poetry.