

BBC Essex Reflection

Sunday 15th October 2017



I happened to have been watching the TV programme **'Strictly Come Dancing'** for the last two Saturdays - my excuse is that I was keeping my mother company as she is a fan of the programme. One of the contestants was the Rev. Richard Coles, a Church of England Vicar in Finedon, Northamptonshire, and a former pop musician. What I found interesting is that he was always referred to as 'The Reverend Richard', in the commentary on his dancing and even on the scoreboard. It got me thinking as to the extent we as humans like 'titles' to describe ourselves. We often say about ourselves that we are what we do – for example a teacher, an accountant, a civil servant an engineer etc. In the church we have titles Reverend for a vicar, Right Reverend for a Bishop. It is almost as if we wish our title to describe ourselves so that we can hide behind it and not reveal our true selves. While titles are necessary to some extent the danger is that we can end up becoming the person that we think 'our' title should be - perhaps a public show of righteousness but with a private life that does not live up to the public persona. Jesus warned of this when He said:

"For what will it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose their very soul?" (Mark 8:36)

The Disney film **"Prince of Egypt"** is an animated version of the life of Moses up to the point he received the Ten Commandments. In the film the writers especially contrast the lives of Moses and Rameses (Pharaoh's son & heir-apparent) who grow up together but eventually become rivals. Moses leaves the court of Pharaoh and eventually re-joins his own people and, following God's call, leads them out of Egypt and confronts Rameses who has become the new Pharaoh. Pharaoh was head of his country and head of the national religion as well. Can you imagine the titles he must have had? 'Right Reverend' would have seemed minor compared to what the Egyptians must have called him, rather like Poo Bah in 'The Mikado' who had the titles of 'Lord High Everything Else.' Moses as an adopted son would have had titles in Pharaoh's court but gave them up to be with his own people. As it says in the Letter to the Hebrews:

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. (Hebrews 11:24-26)

Moses knew Go, and left the trapping of this world behind to follow God's commands; as a result he could personally describe God's love and faithfulness. As one old preacher once said: **"Pharaoh had the titles, but Moses had the testimony."**

As I said, the danger is that titles can become a snare, and in pursuit of the titles we can become what others think we should be and not what God wants us to be. Are you known as a person with a title- describing **what you do**, or are you known as a person with a testimony, being able to say **what God has done** for you and in you and for you?

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Jesus said **“Where your heart is, there shall your treasure be also.” (Matt 6:21)** Let us always humbly set our hearts on what God wants, seek to have a **testimony** of an obedient life, and turn away from the **titles** which can lead us into living out a life which is not authentic and ultimately empty. I for one will not be seeking to join the cast of Strictly Come Dancing, much to my family’s and congregation’s relief! I pray instead that my only desire will be to hear the master’s testimony when my life has come to its end. **“Well done, good and trustworthy servant... enter into the joy of your master.’ (Matt 25:21)**

Paul Greenland