

Insights from the Isles (6)



The Interpreter

Without good direction, people lose their way;
The more wise counsel you follow,
the better your chances. (Proverbs 11:14 The Message).

When disaster comes to a city,
has not the LORD caused it?
Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing
without revealing his plan
to his servants the prophets. (Amos 3:6-7)

A familiar cry in the Old Testament is for someone who could 'interpret' something of spiritual significance. In every single case, this was linked to the interpretation of dreams, just as the word is linked in the New Testament to the interpretation of tongues. The one exception is Jesus' challenge to the Pharisees and Sadducees to interpret the signs of the times. I would like to widen the concept for a moment to include interpretation of what God is doing - whether in our nation, church or our own individual lives.

A few days into our sojourn on Shetland, Ros and I attended a slide show depicting the Four Seasons in Shetland. The photographs were delightful, but the commentary that accompanied them was almost incomprehensible. It was the first time we had come into serious contact with the real Shetlandic dialect. Ros, who has tuned in faster than I have to it, often leant over to interpret for me until a considerate local preacher took up the work of 'simultaneous translation' on my behalf.

I found my mind going back to many dear people who have interpreted for me in different places. I remember one dear friend in Dresden translating the nursery rhyme 'The Grand old Duke of York' for me into German. (I also had him at one point acting the part of the a nineteenth century Shropshire milk maid - a hilarious performance which he declared afterwards was one of the most liberating things he had ever done in his entire life). I have generally been blessed with outstanding translators who I have really flowed with, but I do remember the frustration of speaking to Iranian refugees in Karachi. Every time I came up with a good point, the pastor, who was translating, would preach his own sermon around my point. It made it a decidedly lengthy affair. Hans Wahl in Holland is an exception, but pastors do not always make the best translators.

I remember Phil Buechler in the early days of our acquaintance with him leaning over to whisper in my ear during meetings what he felt the Lord was doing, and where the Spirit was leading. Time after time his suggestions were invaluable.

We are blessed indeed if God has entrusted us with good interpreters - people who know the Lord well, but who are also sufficiently acquainted with our strengths and weaknesses to be able to perceive when we are acting wisely and when we are not seeing straight. So important was this concept of soul direction that the Celtic church declared that the person who does not have a spiritual director is like a chicken running around without a head. Do you have people who can 'interpret' for you? If not, is it worth pondering why not?

The Lord loves to bring people alongside us who have been through similar experiences to ourselves and who can help us understand what is really going on. May we have the determination, and the humility, to seek the advice of others - and to heed the advice we receive. And may we, by grace, be there to interpret for others too.

Just one word of warning. Infinitely precious though such people are, we should never expect them to get everything right. That would be to ask them to play the role of God in your life. The best of the best can only interpret so much.

God Himself, of course, is the final interpreter. One insight from Him can cut through all the clutter and cackle in our mind. Such insights may not come quickly or easily but it is worth praying long and hard for clarity to come and confusion to be put to flight. Pray for the Lord Jesus to come close to you, just as He did to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13f).

Who knows, the Lord may send an angel to us as He did to Daniel to reveal His heart and will. Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. (Daniel 9:22)

Lord, thank You that You are willing to interpret situations for us. Show us what is going on in our own lives, in the Church and in world situations.

Keep our minds open to accept what You say, especially if it appears to contradict what we would ideally have wanted to hear. And then let me act with confidence on the things You have revealed - for to hesitate is to be untrue to You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.