

Time on our hands

Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what's best –
 As above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and from the Devil.
You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!
 Yes. Yes. Yes.

Matthew 6 in "The Message"

It's fairly obvious which prayer has been re-written by Eugene H. Peterson but I have heard people say "it's that new-fangled theology". It challenges our comfort zone and brings to life something we say every day and easily becomes a routine. It appears to many that our modern church and our modern theologians are simply trying to shock for the sake of it.

There was a BBC Radio 4 Sunday Worship programme led by John Bell of the Iona Community that challenged the way we see God (amongst other things) and in it he tells of a report presented to the Kirk's General Assembly in Scotland called "The Motherhood of God", it refused to discuss it, the Assembly threw it out without debate. The service was amazing and I have a copy of the script, but you may still be able to find it available. It is wonderful. It challenges our comfort zones and brings the Bible to life in a new way.

Many years ago I started to read the theology of Professor John Hull. He went blind gradually and he started to question the language we use to talk about God and our relationship with him. He said "the Bible was written by sighted people". As I read, he challenged my comfort zones and made me read the stories I had loved for so long in a new way. In your prayer, take a story you know and love and imagine you are hearing it for the first time being blind. You have never seen the water of the sea, you have never seen a boat sailing on the water, you have never seen a storm and boats being tossed about. Or hear Genesis 1, you have never seen the sun or moon, you have never seen light (so what does it mean to you for Jesus to say "I am the light of the world"?). What are we saying to a blind person when we say that God opens our eyes to see? We need to be aware of the language we use and how it is received. That's how the challenge to our comfort zones brings about change.

Imagine a woman, living in a male dominated world, where all theology is done by men. She is living in a corner of the country which is rich in many ways but is far from the capital and centre of power, both civic power and even further from ecclesiastical power. Living as an anchoress in a small room attached to an insignificant church in the city and surviving a life-threatening illness leading to her claim of being given a series of visions by God. It is a recipe for being ignored. Yet she challenged the comfort zones of those who came to her for counsel, and those who read her book long before the "new-fangled theologians" of today. Try using the Lord's Prayer each day from "The Message", re-read the Bible as if your eyes are blind, (John Hull's books are still in print, "*In the beginning there was darkness*" and "*Sight and Insight*" to name two). Then take yourself back to Julian's days and use this as your prayer:

I saw that God rejoices that he is our Father.
And God rejoices that he is our Mother.
And God rejoices that he is our true Spouse, and that
our soul is his beloved wife.
And Christ rejoices that he is our Brother.
And Jesus rejoices that he is our Saviour.

Julian of Norwich