

Exploring New Worlds

Bryn Jones

"You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, 'Why not?'" George Bernard Shaw

The school was less than a mile away but frequently my mother would have to come looking for me, knowing very well that once again the park pond had lured me! I should have been home in fifteen minutes, but it often took me well over an hour.

To me the park pond was a world of its own. I would press my face close to the water to create the shadow that allowed me to look down into the underwater world. The world of sticklebacks, redthroats, waterboatmen, tadpoles and newts. It was all there in our park pond. I would gaze entranced while time slipped by, wondering what that underwater world was like to live in.

Why were they all so different, I wondered, and how could so many different creatures get on so well? Did they fight? How many meals did they eat each day? I never saw waterboatmen drink. How could they dive under water and stay there for so long without breathing? A child's questions, which may seem silly to the knowledgeable adult, but for me then it was all so mysterious and wonderful.

I even kept my own mini-pond, resplendent with creatures taken home in a tin from the much larger park pond. Everything went well-until the day one of my newts escaped, making its way up our neighbour's drain. She came round asking for help to remove a 'strange-looking creature' in her bath! I didn't dare admit it was my newt, and even got sixpence for picking the creature up and removing it.

We were all happy: she with the newt's removal, me with the sixpence-worth of sherbert and liquorice, and the newt with being back in its pond.

The child's world is one of constant adventure. Who has not smiled at the little girl wheeling her pram, talking to her doll as though it were alive? Or laughed at the boy tumbling down the street as he fights with an imaginary invasion of evil aliens from another planet, then suddenly stopping and throwing his arms in the air like some great conqueror surveying the slain on the field of battle?

I wonder what Jesus had in mind when he said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:3 NASB)? Was he just teaching the simplicity of faith, or was he hinting at the seeing of the kingdom within oneself that requires the child's imaginative eye?

The order and choice of words is significant. He didn't say, 'Unless you become like a child and become converted.' It is the other way round: the childlike attitude is

developed *after* conversion. Is he inferring that there is a rediscovery of imagination and adventure associated with the faith that enters the kingdom, a childlike faith that sees the invisible, and acts as though the invisible were visible?

As far back as I can remember, I have been a dreamer. I don't mean the usual 'cheese dreams' or late-night video-shows of the subconscious, but the wide-awake dreaming of them individualising what things *could* be as opposed to what things are. I mean the seeing of potential far greater than what is currently visible.

My wife and I, in every move of home, have bought an old property, not because we love living in dilapidated buildings, but because we have seen character in a property fallen into disrepair. We have seen what it could be, once restored.

All the great accomplishers of history have been men and women who have learnt to dream, to visualise, to see beyond the present and reach into the future with a faith that has caused the dream to become a reality.

The dreamer is well-known throughout the Scriptures. As God revealed himself to the hearts of men, their minds were opened to see, and their lives thereafter became a pursuit of what they had seen.

Moses came down from Sinai to make a tabernacle in the wilderness according to the pattern he had seen on the mountain. Joseph, in all the hardships of the jails of Egypt, remembered a dream that one day his brothers would bow down before him. It was that dream that prevented his becoming vindictive or bitter, so that when, years later, they did stand before him, he was able to say, 'It was not you who sent me here, but God.' That's the dreamer.

The prophets' dreams became their prophesying, as they spoke of a return from captivity for God's people, of the glory of the latter house being greater than that of the former. Jesus gave the commission to continue the blessing of God to the ends of the earth to a small core of people who believed in him. He saw in them the harvest of the world. Paul saw the purpose for which Christ had laid hold of him and was now in pursuit of that dream with all his might.

All lovers of God are dreamers. Those who worship most love most, and those who love most dream often.

This is what we see with the woman who had been sick with an issue of blood for twelve years. Having spent all her money on private physicians, she was no better for it. Then she heard about Jesus. 'She came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed"' (Mark 5:27-28).

Was she not already seeing herself whole, healthy, strong, able to cope with life again? Before she even ventured out of the house into the crowd, her faith had ventured imaginatively into wholeness.

With what excitement Abraham began his journey to the promised land! Even while he packed his tent to begin the nomadic, pilgrim life, his eye of faith was already looking down through the generations to light upon a city whose builder and maker was God. It was the seeing of that city that enabled him to endure the tent.

We can enjoy the unseen world of God's purposes in our present age. The yet-to-unfold ages of the future, filled with the exciting prospect of co-operation with God, yield their mystery to those whose faith explores beyond the visible. Those who dare to venture beyond that veil find their spirit leaping to lay hold of what their faith sees-and their heart overflows with worship.

Why does sadness mark so many people's lives in adult years? Often it is simply because, somewhere in the harsh experiences of life, they have lost the adventure of a child's exploring mind. Imagination and wonder have died at the hand of the harsh rebuffs of life. They have now become slaves of the sophisticated, intellectual adult world, their lives filled with cares and worries.

The soul ceases to praise when it loses its sense of adventure. Worship ends when mystery and wonder die in the heart of man. But where they are retained, the quickened mind, the released affections are all drawn upwards towards the mysterious beauty with which God has clothed himself.

I remember, one winter, peering through the windows. It was beautiful outside. The snow was still falling, laying down a thick white carpet on the roads, and clothing the hedgerows and trees with a matching coat.

'Come on,' I said, 'let's go out and be the first to leave our tracks.'

My wife and I, and the four children, excitedly put on our warm clothing and boots, and set out.

Everything was so soft, still and silent. The familiar landmarks in the hedgerows were covered over. We were in our well known neighbourhood, but everything looked different, fresh and new, and we were pioneers again, the first to blaze a trail.

After a while the falling snow eased and we returned home again by the trail we'd left behind us. Once indoors we huddled around the open fire, laughing and sharing stories while drinking our hot tea.

How refreshing it is to explore new paths of worship-to blaze fresh trails of exuberant thanksgiving. Let's be adventurous pioneers of praise. Let's cultivate our liberty in worship by stirring ourselves in the adventure of spontaneity.

We must safeguard the spontaneity of our approach to God. Ritualistic elements, however attractive initially, will inevitably weave into a thread of death the mantle of worship.