

# Along the track

## Bad Dog

One of the daily newspapers included the story of a lawyer who, when working for Legal Aid, had to defend a seeing eye dog called Toby who used to walk down to the shops each day and take a large tin of dog food from the supermarket and bring it home in his mouth. His elderly owner thought he was getting it from the Salvos. The supermarket owner knew about it but was unconcerned. But when a grocery chain took over, a private detective was hired to follow Toby home. Charges were laid. In the courtroom, the magistrate said the guilty dog had to be punished. He leaned over the bench, wagged a finger and said sternly "Bad, bad dog". He gave the elderly owner \$100 for further supplies of dog food.

Sometimes we can be very vindictive for not much reason. We can obsess over little things and turn them into major hurdles. Pettiness and anger usually come from a place of our own hurt. So does bullying. Sometimes putting people down, the bitter, caustic comment, spreading the gossip or the rumour comes from our own insecurity – we are threatened by that person or event, we feel insecure ourselves, hurt. So we strike out.

That is particularly true in times of rapid change. We can feel uneasy, threatened, insecure. We can do two things – dig in, put up the ramparts and hold fast, and just hope it all goes away. We can demonise those who have a different view, belittle or attack them. Or we can try to find out what it is all about – why is this happening, why do people feel this way, what is 'the good' in this situation? Where can we find common ground?

Sometimes we need to stop and think – why am I acting this way? We can become very attached to our own anger, our bitterness, our jealousy, our pettiness. It can become a way of life but not a way to live. We can grimly hang on to the nasty comment someone made, that petty response, that perceived insult, we can even become very attached to our own hate.

A real growth point in life is finding a way to identify the root cause of our pain, and express that pain in a way doesn't hurt someone else.

People who are Buddhists speak about death quite a lot. For them we are heading for death from the moment we are born. Preparing for death,

demystifying it, helps us not only prepare for it but facing the inevitability of death, they say, makes us live more kindly, more patiently, more generously. There's nothing like death to make us think about life, they say. For example, if we spend some time thinking on the inevitability of death, we discover that there's no point in being angry with people or holding a grudge because what's the point of all that when you are dead?

Jesus spoke in similar vein. Apart from a number of parables about preparing for death, he said: *What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.... Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.* Mt 15 11, 15-18

So what do we treasure in our hearts? We can become very attached to hurts, anger, bitterness, jealousy, thoughts of payback! These 'defile' us, they make us less than we ought to be, less than we can be. Seeing the world through these eyes defiles our vision, our response to others. We can become suspicious, hungry to dominate and be in control.

Very, very early on in his public life Jesus tells us to 'repent and believe the Good News.' Our English translation leaves something to be desired here - the word for repent is 'metanoia.' Metanoia comes from two Greek words: Meta, meaning above; and Nous, meaning mind. Metanoia invites us to move above our normal instincts, sometimes which can be very petty. Metanoia asks us to work at getting above that, work at a more gracious approach to life, grace-filled even by taking on a mind and heart which rises above self-interest and self-protection which so frequently trigger inside us feelings of bitterness, negativity, and lack of empathy.

If we don't change mind and heart we won't be able to see the good news, let alone believe in it and live it out.

Regards  
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