

The Authentic

Having the opportunity go to the Australian Art Gallery in Canberra a few years back for the Impressionist exhibition was a delight. My heart was set on seeing my favourite painting by called "Starry Night over the Rhone" painted by my favourite artist, Vincent Van Gogh. For years I had seen representations of this painting in art galleries, on posters, postcards, bookmarks and in art books. Something within me however, longed to see the authentic painting. Ultimately, I was not satisfied with the reproductions or representations.

To my delight the painting was on display. As I stood in front of it I was enchanted and transformed. It was magnificent, mystical, captivating and inspiring. It was real. It was the original. It was **authentic**.

As I looked into the authentic painting and observed the resplendent constellations lighting up the velvety night sky, the reflections of the city lights on the night water, the city scape, the boats and the lovers, it drew me into the story. It located me as a budding, amateur artist. Once I had experienced the authentic painting the replicas all lost their voice. I was no longer attracted to the reproductions.

Once we have encountered the authentic, we are transformed and we can never go back to the replica.

Today we are talking about **the authentic**. In pondering this idea of the authentic it is evident that this is emerging more as a modern day construct and the idea has gained momentous popularity. Finding one's authentic self is a catch phrase of the twenty-first century. Prior to the fall we would never have needed to contemplate the idea of the authentic or to try and reconstruct what the authentic actually means. In God's original creative purpose, humanity was created authentic.

God originally fashioned an authentic creation. He created humanity in authentic relationship with himself. He created humanity in authentic relationship with each other. He created humanity as authentic image bearers. He created humanity with authentic morality which was wired into our DNA. He created us with authentic

purpose and authentic meaning. It was an authentic creative expression of God. Genesis 1 and 2.

Of course when the fall occurred, the original, authentic creation was shattered. Genesis 3. Humans became shattered image bearers and driven by the desire to rediscover the authentic.

From the moment of the fall, we see in the Biblical story an expression of the authentic character of God who put into motion a most magnificent redemptive plan designed to reverse the effects of sin and to recover His original, authentic creative purposes.

So, we stop and ask ourselves, why is the search for the authentic so powerful? The short answer is because God's original, authentic creative design, imprint and signature is wired into the essence of our being. Rediscovery of the authentic is intrinsic to our humanity.

Another way of understanding our need to rediscover the authentic and why it is so important is to ask how we respond when the inauthentic story of life is visibly enacted. A recent example is seen in the actions of the Australian cricket team. Many people are cricket fans. Some are not. However, for every Australian, this inauthentic act struck at the collective pride, ethics and image of our Nation. It was an enactment of the inauthentic. The ethical way of winning was betrayed by an inauthentic action. Why the reaction of the Australian Nation? Because deep within our collective essence is the desire for the authentic and any visible distortion or betrayal of this grinds at our collective identity. Underneath all of this is a layer of truth that heralds a biblical truth – that shattered image bearers still hunger for the authentic.

Rediscovery of the authentic and the capacity to enact that is therefore only possible in Jesus who is our creator, who wired the authentic in our original creative design and purpose and who has the authority to restore us. To find the authentic, we must look to Jesus.

If we go back to the idea of standing in front of the original authentic Vincent Van Gogh painting, what made the painting authentic was the artist. The artist gave it its authenticity. Van Gogh dreamed it up, designed it, painted it, put his style into it, put his imprint and signature on it. The artist created it which gave it its authenticity.

God as our creator, who has all creative rights and all authority is the only one who gives humanity authenticity. God as the original designer and creator – the artist, dreamed us up, create us, put his image within us, marked us with His imprint and signature. This is why our desire for the authentic is such a powerful desire and search. It is only God, through Jesus who can reshape us and restore the authentic.

Yet in the search for the authentic and God's original creative purpose, humanity is often driven to find this in all the wrong places that fall short of the real, the original, the authentic. People pursue faulty worldviews, various philosophies, religion, paganism and lifestyle alternatives that all have a "glimmer" of truth but all fall short of the authentic and avert the one God who defines truth and reality and restores the authentic.

To truly find the authentic we must look to Jesus. In the Biblical story all things find fulfillment in Jesus.

When we look to Jesus what do we see? We see:

1. The Authentic **REPRESENTATION** of God

In speaking with Phillip, Jesus says "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus was the perfect representation of God. He showed ultimate love, holiness, truth, goodness, justice, kindness, mercy. Jesus perfectly reflected the father. When Jesus came as the Messiah and was ministering in the first century AD, he came to point people back to God, to reverse the effects of sin and to restore God's authentic, original creative purposes for the Kingdom.

Our challenge? How do we authentically represent the Father every day?

2. Authentic **REALITY**

There is so much competition that claims to be authentic reality. Yet in Colossians 1:15-17 we see that Jesus alone is authentic Reality. Jesus has the rightful claim on reality and truth. Colossians describes Jesus as God, creator of all things, all exist by him and for Him, that He has authority over every realm and all is held together by Him. This is an exceptional summary of Jesus as authentic reality.

In John 14:6, Jesus declares he is ultimate reality and that the authentic is restored in Him because He is "the way, the truth and the life". No one goes to the Father except through Jesus. Restoration of the authentic, discovery of God's original creative purpose, forgiveness of sin and restored relationship with God is only possible through the one true source of all reality: Jesus. Every other worldview, religion or alternative way will fall short of authentic truth found in Jesus.

Our challenge? How do we authentically show that Jesus is authentic reality?
How do we live out the Biblical worldview every day?

3. The **RECOVERY** and **RESTORATION** of Our Authentic Humanity

Jesus was the perfect human being and the authentic expression of our humanity. We locate ourselves in Jesus. Jesus identifies with our humanity and he suffered and entered into our pain. We see who God created and intended us to be. In relationship with Jesus we can recover our authentic humanity.

In our western world, we are exposed to a lot of modern day mantras that promote the idea of finding and becoming our authentic self. We are told to be self-made, self-designed, to champion and evolve our true self. These mantras fail to understand that as shattered image bearers humans are incapable of restoring authentic self. It is not possible to recover the authentic self, outside of relationship with the one who created authentic humanity. Additionally, recovery and restoration of authentic humanity is never done in isolation of God's

community. It is a Christ-centred, Christs-shaped restoration of character that is fashioned within a Christ-formed community.

Our challenge? How do we effectively impart our authentic humanity every day?

4. **REDEMPTION** and **RESTORATION** of Authentic Relationships

Salvation was an authentic act of God to restore us to authentic relationship with Himself through Jesus. This is a miraculous act. Ephesians 1:7-9 speaks of the gracious act of salvation initiated by God that brings forgiveness and restoration.

This act of redemption also made it possible to find restoration in our relationships with each other. In relationship with Jesus we can be restored to authentic relationships with each other as we function as part of God's design for community. Authentic relationships give expression to our unity and diversity as created in God's image and reflect the Trinitarian relationship. As we experience this redemption and restoration, we enact our authentic mission through God's community. Ephesians 4 outlines the nature of living in authentic relationship with others.

Our challenge? How do we show that we have been authentically redeemed and show authentic love as the expression of our restoration every day?

To conclude, we have an everyday unique opportunity to lead others to rediscover the authentic through the one and only authentic source – Jesus. In our school at Pacific Hills we are in a most unique situation where we get to live authentically before God, in an authentic community and to share the authentic message of Jesus every day.

We need to be intentional in how we express this. For example, I am learning to do school tours. I want every exchange with parents to be a God-shaped, authentic exchange. As I engage parents and they ask about Pacific Hills being a Christian school, I can say “we are a Christian School and we teach the curriculum from a

biblical perspective". Whilst that statement is true, I want to impart to each parent something of the authentic heart of God. So I would say, "we are a Christian school and we teach the NESA curriculum from a Biblical perspective. However, most importantly, at our school we believe God sees all children as valuable and made in God's image, with worth and value." What a unique, authentic message for parents to hear. What a unique way for children to be engaged.

As authentic Christians we are marked by the authentic love of Jesus. We are a reflection of Jesus and we show God's original, authentic creative purpose that defines authentic meaning. If the authentic really does matter to us and it is woven into our essence we can assume it matters to the children we teach and the parents we engage.

The following quote encapsulates how we engage in authentic exchanges with others every day. "You teach what you know but impart who you are".

As Jesus has imparted his authentic creative purpose and restoration to us, let us authentically impart this truth every day to others in our world.