

“The Mystery of Attraction”

(Matthew 11.2-11)

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Introduction

I remember meeting Kathryn for the first time... It wasn't *love at first sight*, but certainly an attraction... that built with time until it became overwhelmingly strong. What was that attraction about? Well... the usual boy-meets-girl stuff... she was pretty, lively and fun. But as fabulous as it was, that was superficial 'froth and bubble'... and if that was all, it would have petered out eventually. No, there was something deeper... something that mysteriously drew me to her. It took a year or so for me to be able to name it – that here was my true soul mate... the woman I'd love to the end of time. And then *many more* years further on, I saw deeper into that attraction again... and realised... in this love my wounds would be exposed... and in this love there was hope of healing. That's what drew me... I heard its faint whisper even on that very first meeting... not that I could recognise or name it.

The power of attraction – so strong, so mysterious – and if we *can* hear it, name it and pay attention to it, a deeper world opens.

Jesus and John

In talking about John the Baptist, Jesus questions the crowd... *“What did you go out into the wilderness to see?”* ‘What attracted you? You wouldn't go to all that trouble just to be titillated by some fairy-floss one-day wonder... some half-baked celebrity dressed in fancy clothes. You can see *them* in Jerusalem. No, what drew you to that *desert* place? What *did* you go out to see?’

In putting this question, Jesus is trying to push them beneath the superficial... beyond the vague barely-conscious awareness of motivation... He's probing for what lies beneath the defensive shrug of the shoulders and the... *‘Dunno really... just thought it might be*

interesting... maybe good for a laugh... everyone was talking about him so...' Jesus is trying to get under that bumf and connect with the deep attraction of the heart.

Losing patience (perhaps), Jesus answers the question for them... *'I'll tell you what you went to see. A prophet... a man who spoke with the voice of God... that's what attracted you. It was God's voice that drew you out there.'*

Attraction to Christ

So... what draws us to Christ? Anything? Does *anything* attract us here, or is this simply habit? When we come to St Theodore's on a Sunday morning... this strange *desert place*, when instead we could be having coffee with the beautiful people on the Parade... what do we hope to see... to hear... what do we want to happen? Is there *anything*... anything we could name... or is it all too vague and unspecific? Surely it's got to be more than... liking the organ... or catching up with nice people over morning tea.

Is there a deeper hunger... a deeper attraction? If we *can* name what draws us to Christ, to faith, to church... then a doorway opens to that mysterious world of abundance, that Jesus called the Kingdom.

Driven or Drawn?

In Ignatian spirituality, we make the distinction between *driven* and *drawn*.

What are we *driven* to do? This is the world of compulsion, so the words *should* and *must* dominate. *'I have to do this. I have no other choice.'* Driven behaviour is fuelled by fear (anxiety)... by guilt... and by the unconscious wounds of the past. Because of this initiating origin, driven behaviour is unhelpful and dysfunctional; often doing damage to ourselves as well as those we inflict it on. In the language of Ignatius, this is the realm of *dark spirits*. Whenever we feel driven/compelled it is their dark voices we're following – this is not of God... and this path leads to a living death.

In contrast, the life-giving question is... what are we *drawn* to? What attracts us? You can instantly hear... even *feel*... the difference. Attraction... we are drawn to that which is truly beautiful and good. To that which is for our healing... for our growth... to that which is replete with abundant life. In being *drawn* we follow the way of freedom. There is no compulsion, no fear, no guilt... it is the way of choice. This is a way filled with light... there are no shadows... darkness is banished here. It is the realm of the *good spirits*. When we allow ourselves to be drawn/attracted, we are actually listening to the voice of God... calling us home.

Driven or drawn? Which dominates in your life?

What attracts you to Christ? Can you name it? If you *can* name it, then you can pay attention to it... indeed you can follow this attraction... and it will take you home.

Heart

But many of us find this a difficult question to answer. We're only able to drag up vague feelings at best. What *drives* us is generally much easier to name, even if we don't know where the motivation comes from. What *draws* us is much harder. In part this is because we have an over-developed capacity of *mind* – head-stuff – and an under-developed awareness of *heart*.

Heart is the word Jesus used when talking about life and the kingdom. He taught that the *heart* is the true centre for all behaviour. When the heart is soft and open, alive and healthy, then good actions follow as a natural fruit. But when the heart is hard and closed, when it's dark and dormant through lack of use, then bad actions will inevitably follow.

'*What draws us*' is a *heart* question. The mind will be able to clothe it with words and understanding, but only *after* the heart has revealed the deep attraction within. And so the answer must come from a deeper place than our chattering mind. It's related to intuition but it's more than that... It is something we feel, but it's very different from emotion or sentimentality. It comes from our *gut*... our deep centre. For it is the voice of our soul... our *true self*. It is the voice of our God... calling us home.

Our *heart* does know what attracts us... and if listened to, it will tell us which path to follow. Ageing hippies like me, might remember the phenomenon of Carlos Castaneda's books in the late 1960's and 70's, purporting to be the wisdom of a Yaqui Indian shaman in Mexico... Don Juan. Here's Don Juan teaching the young Carlos Castaneda...

"Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself... one question. This question is one only a very old man asks... Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good. If it doesn't, then it is of no use."

Deep attraction, if studied attentively, will tell us which path leads to life!

Conclusion

What draws you to Christ and the Christian way?

What attracts you?

What does your heart tell you?

Remember the voice of Jesus speaking to the crowds about why they went out to see John... We're talking about *deep* and *abiding* attraction here – not superficial titillation... not the emotional froth of romance or sentimentality... not the quick-hit of any number of consumerist drugs – but rather deep, growing, resilient and powerful attraction, that makes our heart vibrate in recognition and draws us with irresistible love.

Attraction, that which *draws* us, will show us the path to follow. It is the *Holy Way* of Isaiah's prophecy in our first reading (35.1-10). The Way *is* open! We can walk it in safety and with joy. It leads us home to God... to that Kingdom of joy and gladness... that land where sorrow has been exiled forever.

What attracts you? That's the question!