

Villages - October 2024

A few days ago I was reflecting on the reputations certain countries have (the positive ones, not the insulting stereotypes). I was struck in particular by the stories of incredible generosity and hospitality shown by people in Canada and the southern United States. And it got me to thinking about our own country. What is our reputation amongst those who have been here as visitors, and is it one that I recognise and am glad about?

If you had the chance to decide what that reputation was, I wonder what you would pick? What would you most like our country to be known for around the world?

When I was a student, there was a very popular book called “The seven habits of highly effective people”. This was a guide to being successful in business, but proved to be readily adaptable to other areas of life. The habit that had the most impact on me was his second habit: “Begin with the end in mind.” The decisions and actions you take today should be those that will further your long term goal. It is helpful as a parent: if I want my children to be independent as adults, I have to give them increasing opportunities to learn how to be independent. If I want them to be patient, I cannot rush them. That long term goal helps give the perspective needed to make good decisions in the urgency of today.

It works equally well with my question above. What would we like to be known for, how do we wish our country to be? All of us, not just our leaders, need to have a vision for our society, otherwise we will simply make decisions that feel right today, but might not be helpful in getting to that long term goal.

Jesus had one such vision for the world he claimed to have created and for which he died on a cross. He referred to it as “The kingdom of God.” In this world, all of creation - human and non-human - is at peace with God and therefore with every other part of creation. It is “heaven on earth.” It was a vision which was so powerful that he and many of those closest to him were willing to suffer and die for it. There was no shortcut to this world. It required a change of heart and attitude, commitment to Jesus’ vision and a willingness to pay the cost it would take to get there. They believed, as I do, that that best of all worlds is yet to come, but they were

equally committed to helping others see how fantastic it is and how worth the effort it is to try to replicate it at least in part here on earth.

When I used to work with students, one of the questions I was asked most often was “Why am I here, what is my purpose in life?” It may be a question you have asked from time to time.

I believe the answer is twofold. First, to connect with the God who made you and thinks you are the most precious creature ever made. And the other is to imagine with him that perfect world, and each day to make decisions and take actions which, while little in themselves, are a step towards that goal.