

What a Bonanza!

I happened to watch a late night episode of the TV classic *Bonanza* during January, and became more intrigued than usual. The story revolved around two feuding families, who each happen to have had a member of their families fall in love, leave the town, marry and have two children.

Sadly the parents are killed in an accident and the two children are sent to the town so there can be a formal hearing by the local judge to decide their custody.

The judge initially 'orders' Ben Cartwright to look after the children while a final decision is made. He is also charged with making the long-term decision for their welfare. This is because (and the townspeople seemingly do not disagree) is that Ben is a good and Godly man who will make a wise decision. It also reflects an era where the Church was more at the centre of the community than it is today.

Ben is usually in the business of peace-making within the community and church, and he decides to hold a lunch after the church service to welcome a new minister to town. Even this is a little sticky as the feuding parties want to make sure they keep their food separate (would this ever happen in our churches?)

The sermon is preached powerfully and aptly from the sermon on the mount, and the lunch goes off well, especially because the new minister had demanded that there be no guns in church (this was still the wild west) because it was Palm Sunday, and we should "keep things peaceful".

Ben is overawed by his responsibility for the children and he seeks the counsel of the new minister (who is very much a Christ figure.) He is prompted toward the word of God, namely the familiar story in 1 Kings 3 (where Solomon discerned who was the real mother of the baby by ordering it to be cut in half,) and he also remembers the story of God speaking to Samuel.

The final part of the legal hearing has Ben asking only one question of the families (mainly to the grandparents). What will you offer the children?

One family immediately mentions

their wealth and ability to provide all the wants the children would have. The other nearly falls into the trap as well, by wanting to compete in the material sense.

Ben wants them to sincerely say they will love their enemies, and provide a home where the love of God is real and practically shown. He clearly does not want anything in return, and certainly is above corruption by bribe or reward.

Ben then proposes to divide the children, and gives the boy to the grandparents of one family and the girl to the other grandparents. On seeing the distress of the children at this division, one of the grandparents decides it is too much, and she takes 'her' child and asks them to be placed together.

The wealthier family then realises that it is the other family who are best placed to bring up the children. This action is the start of the reconciliation, as both families could now see how the 'homes' the children could have entered would have been based on hate, rather than love. They would have provided a stumbling block for the children, rather than a starting block for the eternal race.

As the minister had predicted, the children would do Ben's work for them.

Where are the Christians today in your community who are called upon by other community members to offer advice and counsel, who lead the community away from sin?

Would you be amazed if someone rang up and asked, "I know you are a member of the local church and 'a good Christian', and I would like your Godly wisdom on this matter of vital importance?" After getting over the initial shock, I would probably trip over the cat in my haste to rush out and meet this 'stranger'.

Where is the place for the man or woman of God who can make a distinct contribution in their local community today? I tend to think that one may have more opportunity in a smaller town than in the somewhat disparate suburban environments of the larger cities, but nevertheless, what could you do to help those you know have that wisdom from God that our communities are crying out for?

Peter Bentley

News

Wesley conference refreshes NSW ministry workers

Wesley Institute held a ministry workers conference at Merroo Conference Centre from 19-21 February, with some 30 ministry workers from across NSW.

Rev Alan Robinson spoke on 'The Future of the Mainline: Movement or Mausoleum?'

While survey results show a large percentage of members are over 70 years of age, the mainline UCA has a future. He encouraged us to ask ourselves 'why do people need Christ?' and 'why do they need the church?'

The conference enjoyed good biblical teaching by Dr Jim Harrison on 'The Role of Suffering in the Life of the Leader, and 'Our Ministry Calling – To Proclaim God's Word,' addressed by Rev Ian Weeks through a study of Ezekiel 1:28-3:15.

Conference organizer Rev Peter Davis, who is Lecturer in Practice of Ministry at Wesley Institute, spoke on 'Growing Emerging Preachers in the Local Congregation,' with practical suggestions for developing preachers in the local setting.

Jennifer Davis led an elective on 'The Human Fuse Box in Pastoral Care - Can we know what people are really feeling?'

Rev Dr Stephen Robinson spoke on his research into Trauma Ministry which has been published in his award winning book, "Ministry in Disaster Settings: Lessons from the Edge". He outlined how ministry workers need training to recognize trauma.

Rev Dr John Dickson – author, musician, historian and minister – led us in three sessions on 'The Historical Jesus and the Mission of the Church'.