

God's bigger picture

Peter Smith | Reader

In a daily newspaper quite a while ago after an extensive international survey they came to the conclusion that people in Europe believed the best joke to be the one which found Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke, nudged Watson and said to him: "look up at the sky and tell me what you see,"

Watson replies, "I see millions and millions of stars,"

"What does that tell you?"

Watson ponders for a minute, "Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Theologically I can see that God is all-powerful and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. What does it tell you?"

Holmes paused a while before speaking, as he often did, then he replied, "It tells me that some thief has stolen our tent."

I can see several themes in this joke but the one that leaps out at me is that there are many aspects in and explanations of any problem or situation; and in many respects the simplest one is the one missed. We can argue that Watson was trying to look for a big complex and convoluted explanation as an answer to Holmes' question because that is what he believed Holmes expected. That is the way Holmes' mind worked. Doing this, though, he missed the most obvious. Often we are prone to miss the obvious and fail to see the bigger picture, missing opportunities to see God at work and not prepared to accept them when they occur. We tend to see our world through a small picture frame enclosed around the edges.

Relaxing into the bigger picture, we often get bogged down with detail, focusing on individual trees, not the forest. As a result we are often faced with something we are unprepared for and unexpected because we think we know what to expect. We have our in built picture and it is difficult to see beyond the frame especially when things don't seem to fit!

We can see Bible events within different frames. Within a small frame the story of Jesus feeding the Five Thousand people we see the detail. Perhaps the boy's mother had sent him out for the day with his picnic and he had wandered along until he joined with the crowds all moving in one direction, soon to find himself listening to a man preaching. Everyone seemed spellbound and they were all sitting there some three hours later. The boy hadn't moved and he had not eaten his picnic either. A man asks for his picnic and he gives him his loaves and fish. Imagine the scene; a huge, hungry crowd and a man asks the young boy for his humble picnic to feed everyone. How absurd, how impossible! Jesus takes it, gives thanks and everyone eats.

But let's go to the very edge of the picture. What do we see? Was it more than a picnic with a preacher? Did the people believe that here was the new Moses come to deliver them from the Romans - more of a revolutionary gathering than a spontaneous picnic. Jesus knew what was going to happen. That is why he

retreated, alone, to the hills immediately afterwards. This is the bigger picture. The boy's picnic was the crucial detail; the bigger frame sees a much more extensive power game. The Jews had been waiting for their Messiah for a long time. They felt they had found him.

The small detail is crucial but let's not get too focused on the detail that we miss the opportunity to see God at work in his bigger picture.