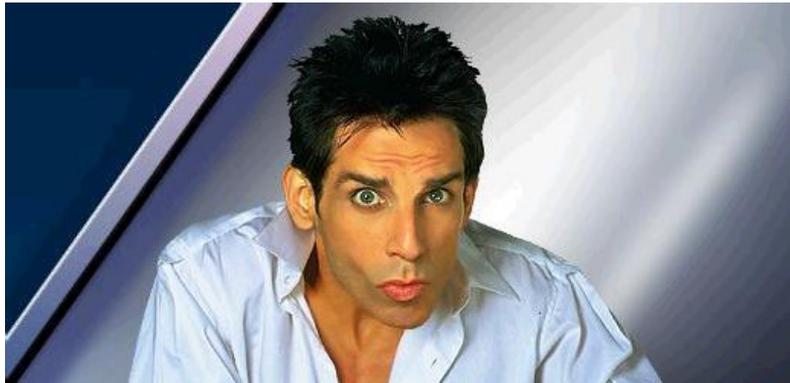


Pentecost 2012

Acts 2:1-15, 31-33, 36-47

The lead character in the cult classic *Zoolander*, is Derek Zoolander – a male model who has three looks – Blue Steel, Ferrari and La Tigra.



For much of the movie Derek is rumoured to be working on a fourth look – *Magnum*.



In the penultimate scene a frustrated fashion designer and bad guy, Mugatu (played by Will Farrell), screeches in exasperation:

“I feel like I’ve taken crazy pills! What’s the matter with you people, can’t you see he only has *one* look!”

Over the last fifteen years as I have slowly tried to adjust to life in New Zealand I’ve increasingly felt like Mugatu. It’s as if I’m on crazy pills. I just don’t get the way many things work in our society – what makes it tick, its values and mores. There’s a kind of strangeness, another worldliness about it all. At times I feel like I’m living in a bizarre reality TV show where truth and fiction, comedy and tragedy, documentary and drama inter-mix to the point where I’m not sure which is which.

Malcolm Muggeridge once commented that, as editor of *Punch* magazine, he was constantly hard put to find better satire than real life.¹ From where I sit, this blurring of reality with fantasy, and visa-a-versa, is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in political discourse in New Zealand – the Dot Com fiasco being just the latest example; but we could just as easily point, say, to sport.

I remember the first time I went to the Super 14 (as it was then), at the Cake Tin. Every time things threatened to flag a bit, we were pounded with ‘70’s solid gold hits or even a bit of Jimmy Hendrix – apparently in

¹ See Malcolm Muggeridge *Living Through An Apocalypse*, address the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism, 1975. See <http://www.lausanne.org/docs/lau1docs/O449.pdf> p.453 from *let the earth Hear His Voice*.

order to keep us hyped. I'd already noticed the same thing on Sky Sport. It's as if we had to feel we were in a TV show for it to be "real". As if to prove my point, I noticed half the crowd spent their time watching the re-runs on the screens rather than the game on the field.

Ironically, and more disturbingly, it has become increasingly apparent to me that this is just how the rest of society sees the church and religious people in general: Christian Heritage turns out to be run by a paedophile; Christians have never been more visibly active in recent years than in their angry demand to be legally entitled to hit their children; right-wing political blogger Matthew Hootten recently argued that ultra conservative Colin Craig,² should stay out of Epsom and "stick a provincial seat with a high religious population."³ Clearly Christians are seen as being on crazy pills, of a sort, as well.

This is, of course, just the reaction that those watching and listening to the disciples had on Pentecost morning. These people were either drunk or crazy. Peter, on the other hand, argued that it was prophecy – it was God talking – and the talk was of "this Jesus, whom *you* crucified" but whom "God declared Lord and Messiah" through his resurrection.⁴

No wonder we are so afraid of Gospel proclamation as a church. With this sort of korero we may as well speak in tongues – who today will understand such alien if not crazy religious talk?

...

On Pentecost Sunday it is de rigeur to point to the coming of the Spirit as God's equipping of his church for mission. I for one long to see a church with where signs and wonders bring people into an encounter with God. But in saying this the danger is, of course, that we reduce mission to a kind of religious side-show selling snake oil or the spiritual equivalent to a Rawleigh's ointment – good for whatever ails you.

² The [Conservative Party of New Zealand](#) is a [political party](#) founded in [New Zealand](#) in August 2011. It advocates [fiscal conservatism](#), [social conservatism](#), the repeal of the [New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme](#) and the [child discipline law](#), and the use of binding [referenda](#). [Colin Craig](#), who polled third in the [2010 Auckland mayoral election](#), leads the party.

³ http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10805833

⁴ Acts 2:23-24, 31-33, 36.

Yes, the post-Pentecost church *was* a place where extraordinary acts of the Spirit abounded – and we always do need earnestly to seek this Spirit ministry as a church.

Interestingly though it was the life-style of the early believers that *authenticated* this ministry.

The carefree, happy revolution of those early believers have its up and its downs (as we later read in the Acts narrative),⁵ but it was immensely attractive,⁶ and absolutely crucial both validating and making comprehensible that which the believers everywhere and at every opportunity *proclaimed* forthrightly.⁷ Proclamation, extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit and a radically authentic lifestyle are always linked when we read to the Gospel's progress throughout Acts.

Where am I going with this?

It seems to me here is a way through for us as we seek to become part of what God is doing in New Zealand today; if we want to avoid talking past each other as a church and as a society. Even if I see New Zealand culture and society as kind of manic and crazy, and even if “ordinary Kiwis” see religious like me as just the same, people *do* know truth when they *see* it. Yes we need to articulate the Gospel, clearly and directly, with *words*, but we need to *live* it as we speak it.

Two weeks ago our bishop elect, Justin Duckworth, was interviewed on the ZB network by Paul Holmes.⁸ Holmes is no friend of organised religion – as many will recall from his derisive put-downs of the Hikoi of Hope some years ago.⁹ Yet at the end of the interview Holmes concluded,

“Well fantastic to talk with you [Justine], and fantastic about your election. I'm sure there will be the odd curmudgeon who's a bit worried about the way you look and the way you

⁵ Acts 5:1-11.

⁶ Acts 5:13.

⁷ Acts 4:32-37.

⁸ <http://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/Auckland/player/ondemand/1303746092-Paul-Holmes-talks-to-Wellington-Bishop-Elect-Justin-Duckworth>

⁹ <http://www.nzine.co.nz/hot/hikoi.html>

talk, but I'm sure there is an overwhelming number of people terribly excited by your election. And I'm one of them. And I thank you very much for your time today... [That was] Justin Duckworth... at the tender age of 44 he walks the talk.”

I have to say I've had the same reaction from passers-by in the street, extended family and nominal church members alike. People long for *truth*. They long to hear it and they long even more to *see* it and *experience* it.

The power of the Holy Spirit is to transform us into such a people, to give us the courage and fortitude to become such a people, a *Holy* people dedicated to living and proclaiming a God who does wondrous things, who changes lives, who redeems hopeless situations, who sets us free to become who he created us to be.

God longs to give us this Spirit – if we let him.