

We all know that the way we are living at the moment, socially distancing is difficult and there are many people and businesses struggling, but until recently I hadn't given a thought to theatres.

I enjoy a day trip to the Saturday matinee at Pitlochry theatre. So, it is sad to see how that theatre is struggling. If it were to reopen with social distancing in place it could only accommodate 70 people in its auditorium and that is just not financially viable. I'm a big fan of JM Barrie and over the last few years Pitlochry has presented a series of his plays including Peter Pan.

The thing about his plays is the detailed description of settings that sits alongside the dialogue.

His introduction to act 2 covers four pages describing Never land before you get anywhere dialogue.

'When the blind goes up all is so dark that you scarcely know it has gone up. This is because if you were to see the island, the wonder of it may hurt your eyes. If you all come in spectacles I suppose you may see it.

This is because the whole island is in a ferment because the tidings that Peter is returning has leaked out.

J M Barrie obviously thought it was impossible to construct a set that reflected his imagination back in the early 1900's.

But patience, fast forward to 2018 and the national theatre who produced a version where they pick up on the idea of a land ferment. So excited were they that Peter was returning and in their version the curtain goes up on a very bright, very busy circus scene. And it certainly gives a wow factor through which you can feel the excitement of Peter's gang awaiting his return.

You are helped to make sense of what is happening. It brings the world of never land into focus which in truth is J M Barrie bringing somethings of our world into focus.

The message of Christian Aid has a similar objective. Love never fails. But experience tells us we need patience and endurance to make sense of that.

And when it comes to the parables, the gospel writer's intent is something similar.

To create pictures that focus on what never failing love looks like.

But , you need to have ears to listen and eyes to see.

But this is really not just about eyes and ears. This is about bringing our world into focus. Just as Christian Aid urges us to do. Just as Peter Pan does.

We know the story of the sower well. Then again maybe we know it too well.

We know that we are to imitate the good ground and we know that in the end there is a great harvest.

Don't ask how it is to be done. A sower never needs to know that. The sower scatters his seed over the earth and goes on living while the seed germinates and comes up without the sower knowing how. God has given what is sown a body.

This is good advice. We don't need to know how, but it is difficult to follow because we all want to know how things happen.

Maybe that is why we are tempted to skip straight from the story to Jesus explanation.

The seed that falls on the good soil bears fruit. Mathew and Mark both emphasise that; the amount of fruit for those who listen and hear,

But Luke takes a slightly different view.

He emphasises the process.

Luke focus on the idea that it takes patience and endurance to produce the harvest or as Christian Aid put it love never fails to produce a harvest eventually.

Sometimes it feels as though the church has forgotten this need for patience and endurance.

There are so many programmes available promising instant results.

Luke acknowledges that while it is good soil that is needed, his readers can be a bit impatient for results. So he focuses on the process by which we get results and that involves patience.

Bearing fruit takes time and endurance. It's not easy.

JM Barrie introduces Act 2 of Peter Pan, the point where Peter returns to Never land, through describing and naming the members of Peter's gang. Finally he gets to the twins. The other two members are twins, he writes. Twin one and twin two who cannot be described because we should probably be describing the wrong one. Hunkering down or peeping out of their holes, the six boys are not unlike village gossips gathered around the village pump.

Is that how we see the disciples? Are they gossips around the village pump trying to make sense of the definition of love?

When they ask Jesus for an explanation

He replies you know the message, but others don't

Then he quotes from the prophet Isaiah.

I heard the voice of the Lord saying

Whom shall I send?

And I said here am I, send me

And he said go and say to the people keep listening, but do not understand.

No, the disciples of all time are not to be gossips, but they are to be sent out like mini-Isaiah's with a message that involves great hope and the promise of love that never fails, but also the need for endurance and patience. These things will not happen easily or quickly

And that is a message for us today isn't it? Not just in helping Christian Aid with its work, but in wondering what the church will look like after lock down. Will the new ways of worship that have popped up continue to flourish?

This parable is above all a call to us as a church not to forget our basic requirement to help others, to see fair play.

To present the message and let God do his work in his own way.

It is Christian aid week and that message is before our eyes. Yes we donate, but the church is encouraged to do more: to have patience and endurance as we stand as mini Isaiah's presenting those around us with a choice to listen, or not, to the needs of the world and God's people.

Because it is in listening and really hearing that the good fruit will eventually appear through persistence and endurance.

Love never fails.

Peace be with you,

Amen