

## The invisible rainbow

*An ideal introduction would be to the sound of thunder and heavy rain with someone appearing under an umbrella. The rain stops and the person folds down the umbrella and begins the following dialogue to illustrate the importance of working together for the Church to be a rainbow of hope. The person speaking the God voice is not seen.*

Excuse me, God, but what have you done with the rainbow?

**I have done nothing with the rainbow my child**

But I can't see it and it's been raining cats and dogs!

**Are you sure it's not there?**

God, I CAN see the sky. The clouds have gone. It's clear and blue, the sun is shining, but there is no rainbow. I CAN see!

**Are you sure?**

God, of course I'm sure!

**Can you see me?**

No!

**But I am here, aren't I?**

Yes, of course you're there, but...

**I haven't taken the rainbow from the sky**

...but, it's not there!

**I've just removed the colours**

But, God, they ARE the rainbow

**No, my child, they just make the rainbow visible**

The beautiful colours remind us of your wonderful promise to us

**The colours are not telling the story I want them to though**

But green is the colour of life and hope

**That was what I intended, but it has been creating death and despair**

And blue is the colour of peace

**I have hidden it because it was making war, not peace**

And what about the warmth and joy that yellow brought?

**It was causing pain and tears**

Orange? It was the sign of health and strength

**It was making people weak with sickness**

Red reminded us of passion and love — the life blood of the earth

**It was staining the earth with the colour of blood, becoming a symbol of hatred not love**

But God, what about purple, the sign of authority?

**An authority abused. It had become an oppressor causing injustice. It had to go!**

But why hide indigo? It was the colour of reflection, prayer and peace.

**It became so selfish. It created a faith without any action**

So you've taken away the rainbow?

**No! I've just removed the colours because they weren't doing the job they were created to do.**

But the rainbow reminds you of your promise to us

**Yes, the rainbow not the colours. The rainbow is still there**

How can we follow a rainbow we can't see

**In the same way that you follow me. You can't see me, can you?**

No, but we know you want us to follow the words of your Son

**Exactly! So the words are like the paint which give colour and beauty to the story I want you to live**

You mean like an outline the an artist draws before adding the paint?

**You're beginning to understand!**

So the outline of the rainbow is there without the colours?

**That's right!**

Like your Son? Like your Church? Like your Kingdom? The outlines are always there....

**Just not visible**

Because people don't paint in the colours of life, love, peace and justice...

**That's right! People haven't accepted their differences to work together like a rainbow to the world**

A rainbow reaching from heaven to earth....just like your Kingdom!

**So you can see the rainbow now?**

Yes! You mean like outline an artist draws before adding paint?

**Amen!**

*And now the Elmwood story.....*

## The painting of a rainbow

The Church is just like a rainbow, but it can only be a rainbow which the world can see when the colours work together. Then it becomes a great sign of hope that brings the Kingdom of heaven to the shores of earth.

We are painting a story at Elmwood and pray that one day it will be a part of the rainbow, if it hasn't already done so. It is not a United Reformed Church rainbow because that is just a colour mixed with a colour to make one colour of the rainbow!

Our vision is to be part of a Church in which we are 'as one as the Father and Son are one' (John 17: 21) with all the richness of our cultural diversities blending together like the rainbow in the sky.

It is a vision which has evolved, and continues to do so, as we seek not to build a United Reformed Church which is stronger and bigger but work with the different gifts around us to shape God's Kingdom which is so close if only the colours of the rainbow would stop fighting!

The great flood today is caused by the rising waters of despair and the rainbow is our sign of hope that God will save us when we work together across the boundaries of tradition, race and culture.

Elmwood has always been a church with a great community spirit and a vision to work together, but new cultural differences have evolved in more recent years which have had to be embraced.

When the Church was redeveloped in 2002 it was with a vision for a building which could be home for different groups which could be seen as one under the same roof reaching out with the love of Christ.

The African Seventh Day Adventist Church joined the Elmwood family when they were formed with 12 members and grew to over 100 within a few months. They eventually outgrew the Elmwood facilities and moved to a local school but not before the formation of Joyous Symphony, a choir with a growing reputation for their African gospel style and who will be appearing at Birmingham Town Hall. (December 5<sup>th</sup> 2009).

Joyous Symphony continue to rehearse at Elmwood and the African Seventh Day Adventists remember us as their first home.

At the same time two Pentecostal churches, Lighthouse Chapel and Calvary Miracle Centre, made their homes at Elmwood. Lighthouse Chapel, like the Seventh Day Adventist grew from being a small group to hundreds and moved when we sold Church House.

Now we share our building with Calvary Miracle Centre and the principle is that we develop a relationship as though we are brothers and sisters sharing a home rather than that of landlord taking rent from a tenant.

We build the relationship by inviting their Pastors to preach at our services and coming together for occasional events and meet each other between services on Sunday.

We also reach out to the large Asian community of Handsworth Wood by accommodating the Asian Stroke Victims Support Group twice a week and many children use a pre-school group managed with the Salvation Army.

We have recently started to develop a relationship with a group of Asian Christians and with them have promoted a two-night event for young people with 'open mic' and a conference, The Truth Revealed. It has the potential of being another exciting relationship in which neither of us feel threatened by the other because we have a shared vision to build God's Kingdom not a Church empire.

We have also developed relationships with churches in Jamaica and Zimbabwe having had visits to and from both and host a project working with asylum seekers.

God's kingdom is one in which black, white and Asian can come together and that is reflected in our congregation but also in our broader vision to paint a rainbow in which we can be as one with all our differences. We encourage everyone to use their gifts for the glory of God whether they come from our fellowship or another and one day we hope that the Church will provide a rainbow of hope for the world.

That can't happen until the colours of the rainbow stop fighting.....

Richard Becher (Revd)  
Elmwood, United Reformed Church, Birmingham