In 2004 Victor Yushchenko stood for the presidency of the Ukraine. Vehemently opposed by the ruling party Yushchenko’s face was disfigured and he almost lost his life when he was mysteriously poisoned. This wasn’t enough to deter him from standing for the presidency.

On the day of the election Yushchenko was comfortably in the lead but the ruling party tampered with the results. The state-run television station reported “ladies and gentlemen, we announce that the challenger Victor Yushchenko has been decisively defeated.”

In the lower right-hand corner of the screen a woman by the name of Natalia Dmytruk¹ was providing a translation service for the deaf community. As the news presenter regurgitated the lies of the regime, Natalia Dmytruk refused to translate them. “I’m addressing all the deaf citizens of Ukraine” she signed. “They are lying and I’m ashamed to translate those lies. Yushchenko is our president.”

The deaf community sprang into gear. They text messaged their friends about the fraudulent result and as news spread of Dmitruk’s act of defiance increasing numbers of journalists were inspired to likewise tell the truth. A million people wearing orange made their way to the capital city of Kiev demanding a new election – the orange revolution began. The government was forced to meet their demands, a new election was held and Victor Yushchenko became president.

Interesting, but what’s this got to do with the Gospel. The big screen was telling the people a falsehood and the small screen was speaking the truth, quietly in the corner, for those who listened, and understood the language.

What is the Big Screen, dominant message in our world today?

My role here is as College Chaplain and so I get to support our students through their time in College. It’s given me some insight into the pressures facing young people today. The voice of the Big Screen says that it’s important to be successful, to have lots of friends (as measured by Instagram likes and

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataliya_Dmytruk
facebook requests), to succeed at all we do, to be productive, busy and that we must at all times be happy, or at least show that we are to everyone around us.

The pressure to keep this up is overwhelming. I see a steady stream of young people who are on the outside hugely successful, intelligent and impressive, but they tell me that they are weighed down with anxiety, fears and sense that they don’t measure up.

My sister facilitates sessions helping people who are facing retirement and she tells me those who are coming to the end of their working lives often fear they will no longer be of value to society.

The big screen tells us that our value comes from our productivity and usefulness, what we do is more important that who we are. It is a trajectory of power, acquisition and might. And comes in direct contrast to Jesus’ teaching, which I’ll come onto shortly.

With this in mind we look to the Gospel reading and find Jesus’ frustration that although he and John the Baptist had been speaking truth to the people, the people didn’t recognise what they had to say because they were so busy looking for someone else.

‘John came neither eating or drinking and they say ‘he has a demon’, the Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say ‘he’s a glutton and a drunkard’.

They didn’t listen to John the Baptist because he was an aesthetic, wore the wrong type of clothes and looked a bit wild; they didn’t listen to Jesus because he spent time with those who everyone knew were unclean and sinful, the tax collectors and ‘sinners’.

Sometimes we find it hard to hear truth because it doesn’t come to us through the people we expect to hear it from. An unheard of sign language translator told the truth to the people of the Ukraine. My father once admitted that he finds it hard to listen to a talk by anyone wearing jeans and scruffy clothes; but my New Zealander brother in law admitted that he finds it hard to listen to anyone in a suit and tie.

We all have our prejudices that get in the way of hearing what we need to hear. And we want our leaders to behave in the way we decide leaders should behave. We don’t have to look far to be reminded of how we build up leaders and then destroy them when they don’t act in the way we want them to.
But God does not behave how we necessarily want God to behave. God has always been the God of Surprises, who reveals himself through unlikely people in unlikely places. The big screen said the messiah would come in power and might and then Jesus slipped in on the small screen, ‘humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey’ as we heard in the prophet Zechariah.

And so what does Jesus say to those who are willing to listen to him, to those who are looking for a different way of living than the one dictated by the big screen. What does he say to my stressed out and anxious students, or to all of us struggling with our lives.

Jesus says ‘Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’.

‘Come to me.... and you will find rest for your souls’

An archaeologist once hired some Inca tribesmen to lead him to an dig deep in the mountains. After they had been moving for some time the tribesmen stopped and insisted they wouldn’t go any further. The archaeologist grew impatient and then angry. But no matter how much he cajoled the tribesmen wouldn’t move. Then all of a sudden the tribesmen picked up the gear and set off. When the bewildered archaeologist asked why they had stopped and refused to move for so long, the tribesmen answered,

“We had been moving too fast and had to wait for our souls to catch up.”

Rest for our souls, our very selves – perhaps that’s just what we so badly need from God.

We might think we want God to change all sorts of things in our world or in our lives. To take away our problems, to remove our burdens, to make things better. We might be frustrated God doesn’t intervene more. We may be frustrated that God isn’t the kind of God we want him to be.

Jesus wasn’t the kind of leader they expected, but rather than changing to be what others want he just gives an invitation: ‘Come to me, and rest.

Rest is an important theme running through scripture and it’s linked with the idea of Sabbath. We often see Sunday as the beginning of our week, coming to Church as a way to set us up for the week ahead. But for Jewish people Sabbath is the end of the week. Having done everything required, all the work done we can now stop, we can rest and worship. There is a sense of completion and a deeper sense of spiritual wholeness; a completion that makes sense of everything that has gone before.
In Hebrews 4 ‘anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his’.

‘Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’.

The big screen message says we need to do more, achieve more, be more. It is a lie. The small screen message says the truth.

We have worked hard. We don’t need to prove any more. We don’t need to prove our worth. ‘There is nothing we can do to make God love us more, there is nothing we can do to make God love us less’.  

So let’s just stop for a while, rest and worship.

For a while let’s ignore the big screen’s lies and listen to the small screen truth where Jesus gently invites us to:

‘Come to me, all who are weary, I will give you rest’.

---

2 Yancey, Philip, What’s so Amazing about Grace