

12th July 2021

Imagery

Metaphor noun

1. A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.
2. A thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract.

My son once said that I speak in metaphors. He's right! I've always found that using imagery in communicating important ideas is more appealing than trying to explain things using big words no one can understand.

A few weeks ago, I reflected on the importance of the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd". Here, surely, is the use of metaphor *par excellence*. For the image of God as our shepherd is something that the people of the psalmist's day could clearly relate to. And, indeed, the metaphor of "shepherd" has been a helpful one ever since.

But what if an imagery from rural life is lost on you? This was the problem Carl Burke had in the 1960s when he worked with inmates in Erie County Jail in New York State. Shepherd? How could he communicate the tender mercies of God as our shepherd when none of the young men had the faintest idea what a shepherd was? So Burke used the metaphors of the streets to communicate the Bible's truths, and had the men rewriting Bible stories using language and imagery they could relate to. And the 23rd Psalm? It turned out like this:

The Lord is like my Probation Officer. He will help me. He tries to help me every day. He makes me play it cool, and feel good inside of me. He shows me the right path, so I'll have a good record, and he'll have one too. Because I trust him – and that ain't easy. I don't worry too much about what's going to happen. Just knowing he cares about me helps me. He makes sure I have my food, and that Mom fixes it. He helps her stay sober, and that makes me feel good all over. He's a good man, I think, and he is kind; and these things will stay with me. And when I'm kind and good, then I know the Lord is with me like the Probation Officer.

"The Lord is like my Probation Officer" from *Psalm 23: An Anthology*, edited by K. H. Strange and R. G. E. Sandbach is © the Contributors 1987. Published by St Andrew Press. Used by permission. rights@hymnsam.co.uk.

An assignment for today – or is it a prayer?

What metaphor would you use to communicate what God means to you, and how might you use that imagery to rewrite Psalm 23? Have a go, prayerfully ...