

A New Framing Story

The concept of a 'Paradigm Shift' was created by philosopher Thomas Kuhn. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term as 'a time when the usual and accepted way of doing or thinking about something changes completely'. A paradigm is like a pair of glasses. If the lenses are pink, the world looks pink. A change of lens gives a radically different view.

For a long time, people believed the earth was flat. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle was the first to propose an observation that the earth was round. Nevertheless, this theory did not publicly replace the original paradigm theory until Ferdinand Magellan sailed around the world in 1519.

Until very recently, so-called modern societies thought they could exploit the natural world without restraint or regard – clear forests, dump pollutants, rip minerals from the earth, 'harvest' species, etc – and that it would have no effect on the balance or capacity to regenerate. We're currently realising that it's all connected, a sensitive web, and that our actions do have an effect. The paradigm is shifting.

Theologian and writer, Brian McLaren uses the term 'framing story' to describe the phenomenon of paradigm. A framing story 'gives people direction, values, vision, and inspiration by providing a framework for their lives – tells them who they are, where they come from, where they are, what's going on, where things are going, and what they should do'. McLaren suggests that a growing list of global crises (what some call 'wicked problems') coupled with our struggle to address them effectively, gives us strong evidence that our world's dominant framing story or paradigm is failing.

If our framing story 'tells us that the purpose of life is for individuals or nations to accumulate an abundance of possessions and to experience the maximum amount of pleasure during the maximum number of minutes of our short lives, then we will have little reason to manage our consumption', McLaren writes. 'If our framing story tells us that we are in life-and-death competition with each other . . . then we will have little reason to seek reconciliation and collaboration and nonviolent resolutions to our conflicts'. However, 'if our framing story tells us that we are free and responsible creatures in a creation made by a good, wise, and loving God, and that our Creator wants us to pursue virtue, collaboration, peace, and mutual care for one another and our planet, and that our lives can have profound meaning if we align ourselves with God's wisdom, character, and dreams for us . . . then our society will take a radically different direction, and our world will become a very different place.

Christians, have the opportunity to live the story given to us at the beginning (Genesis 1), that creation is 'good' and that our vocation is to nurture this goodness wherever we can. We've just celebrated Christmas, remembering the birth of Jesus, and as we reflect on his way in coming months, we'll see that he came not to repeat but to subvert stories of violence and harm. Instead of patriarchal stories of domination, he taught and embodied service, reconciliation, and self-giving. Instead of stories of violent

revolution or revenge on the one hand or compliant submission on the other, he taught and modelled transformative nonviolent resistance. Instead of the purification stories of scapegoating or ethnic cleansing, he encountered and engaged the other with respect, welcome, neighbourliness and mutuality. Instead of inhabiting a competitive story of accumulation, he advocated stewardship, generosity, sharing, and a vision of abundance for all. Instead of advocating escapist stories of isolation, he sent his followers into the world to be agents of positive change, like salt, light, and yeast. And instead of leaving the oppressed in stories of victimization, he empowered them with a vision of faith, hope, and love that could change the world.

This is our framing story, our motivation and mission, for as we've heard again in recent weeks, his call to us all is: 'Follow me'.

References

Thomas Kuhn (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press.

Brian D. McLaren (2007) *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*, Thomas Nelson.