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Truman show religious symbolism

Esquire magazine called the Truman Show a film of the decade, and despite the lack of Oscars it received, I understand the claim. If you haven't seen him yet, it's the story of one man, Truman Burbank, who has been a central figure in the 24-hour daytime TV show since the day he was born, even if he doesn't know it. The story is really a story about how he finds out the truth about his life and what he decides to do. People love the film for a variety of reasons: it's a big satire on materialism; it's a wonderful romantic comedy. I liked it for all these reasons, but as a follower of Jesus, I read it in a different way too. What I want to offer is my reader's answer if you want. You don't have to like it or agree with my reading. However, I offer it to you because it may be a new way of thinking about the Christian faith. Most people who don't consider themselves Christians are not infidely because They've researched historical and philosophical evidence and found Christianity intellectually lacking. More people are unsuaded by the Christian faith because they have no good metaphors, no useful images of what it means, what it claims to offer. Part of my job as a teacher of the Christian faith is not just to convince people that it's true, but to find metaphors that tell them, Oh, that's what it's about. I've never thought of it that way. So that's why I want to offer three powerful metaphors for the Christian faith taken from the Truman Show. The first has something to do with the fact that: 1. Something about ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, starvation in North Korea or the destruction of rainforests in Brazil, our world is full of problems. The Truman Show shows another aspect of what's real. The creator and producer of Truman's world, Christof (Ed Harris), right at the beginning of the film, invites us to compare our world and Truman's world: We got bored of watching actors who give us false emotions... While the world he inhabits is, in some ways, falsified, there is nothing false about Truman himself. It's not always Shakespeare, but it's real. It's life. Toward the end of the film, Truman asks Christof about his life in this world: Was it nothing real? and Christof replies: You were. The irony is that Christof thinks Truman's world is less artificial than our own. Yet in Truman's world, everything is fake, from the sun in the sky to traffic news on the radio to his relationship with best friend. All the characters except Truman are professional actors who give us false emotions. More than that, there are actors operating in an expanded business. Everyone except Truman is programmed, except for their precise steps and words and reactions, and careful product placement. There's a wonderful moment when the production team, who just engineered a tearful encounter between Truman and his father, are moved by the artificial scenes they just created! Truman is simply a living work of art: manipulated, used, commercially, spied on by 5,000 cameras, even when asleep. The sense of unreality is heightened by the fact that you can buy anything you see in the show, from actors' clothes to entire homes, from the Truman catalog. The reality is even more convoluted. When Truman begins to doubt what's going on, his friend Marlon makes an emotional speech that ends with the words: The last thing I've ever done is lie to you. But that's the script, too! Sentence The last thing I would ever do is lie to you is a lie in itself. So when Christof says Truman is real all that means is that Truman is not scripted... but all his real, unscripted answers are all false situations. Its reality is very relative, very limited. He's a real person, but in a completely plastic world. Christof tells Lauren: The world, the place where you live, is a sick place. Seahaven than we'd like to believe. Seahaven represents the tendencies our world has taken to the extreme. As so often when we laugh, it's because we recognize the truth: we laugh at each other. How is Seahaven like our world? Because it's hard for us to distinguish between real and fake. Are we real? All the time? Are our friends real? All the time? Can I trust people? Are they using me? Are you secretly going to make me laugh? Jim Carrey himself begs this question: I don't think there's any of us who hasn't at one point in our lives thought we were the only real person and everyone else was an actor in some experiment of the gods. Or take another example. Truman thinks he's single, he thinks about himself, he makes his own decisions. But at least until the beginning of the movie, he's wrong. All-his fear of water, his friendship, his choice of job, his marriage-were all calculated and manipulated by someone else. We, too, like to think that we are free and we can make our own decisions. But where did this come from? Who told us? Generally speaking, the media, professors, friends, books: they imposed on us our so-called freedoms (without explaining why they thought it was true), they told us that we could think for ourselves (with authority that, oddly enough, we stop at the question). Is me of The Life of Brian, where Brian tries to get rid of his admirable followers, and he says, You all have to think of yourself and they chant back, we all have to think of ourselves. Like the Truman Show, the Christian Faith says that something is wrong with our world, which is more than any particular symptom. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. There is a systemic problem, and Jesus' explanation was that at heart it was something related to our approach to God. Nietzsche, somewhat surprisingly, illustrated Jesus' beliefs very powerfully in a parable of a madman when he said that in our attitude to God, we are like planets that have cut off from their orbit around the sun and are drifting into space. Planets are free in a sense, but they are also drifting goallessly away from the only source of light and heat, stability and life they could ever have. In Jesus' vocabulary, the technical term for this state is sin. Many people don't understand the word, and I think it means doing things wrong, especially sex, if you're married, and even then you shouldn't enjoy it too much. But no, there is an attitude in Jesus' understanding of sin that he wants to be independent of God. This is what ultimately causes our sense of unreality. After all, God created reality, and God is the source of all reality, so only in relation to God can we experience true reality. G.K.Chesterton once said that sin is the only Christian doctrine that can be empirically proven. By that he means that we all feel and experience it and know its effects: whether it is in our sense of unreality, fear of manipulation or our distrust of relationships. But that's not all. There is a second theme running through the film that resonates for me as a follower of Jesus. It's those things that sociologist Peter Berger calls: 2. Rumors of Angels Piece by Little Truman Perceptions of Change. Little by little, he gets signs that the world he grew up with isn't the whole story. Cracks appear on the façade of its reality. He becomes dissatisfied with his life in Seahaven. Things happen, with things and with people that don't fit. He's getting hints of more reality than he's experienced before. I counted thirteen of these symptoms (but there may be more) of these signals of the world outside Seahaven. We've already seen one of them: a lamp falling from the sky. Later, it rains on him and nowhere else does a sudden rain shower. He noticed that his wife's fingers are crossed in their wedding photos. The cops he's never met before, miles from home, know his name. And then, at the highest level, lauren's here. He's out of the world. She's taking care of Truman, she's sorry, she wants to save him. And more clearly than anyone else, she's trying to tell Truman the truth about life until she was forcibly dragged away. Truman's going to get things out of the basement. His secrets are kept in the basement: family photos, toys, a map of the world, a compass, Lauren's jacket. In pop psychology, the bottom often represents the subconscious. It may be significant that the basement is the only messy place we've ever seen in Seahaven. It's in the basement that she's trying to reconstruct a photo of Lauren with pieces ripped from fashion magazines. In a sense, this photo is a symbol of what is happening in his relationship with Seahaven. Little by little his old world is falling apart; Little by little, he puts together pieces of a new world. Truman faces a classic paradigm shift: he's going to swap one picture of reality that no longer works, for a bigger one that makes better sense of the data. In the same way, Christians believe God is trying to tell us that there is a greater reality than this world-reality than this that makes better sense to data. And maybe in a sense we have all the basements, a place where we collect footprints and try to put them together. People who become followers of Jesus often look back and realize how it led to that point. Often, like Truman, they feel reality shifts bit by bit, while the old way of looking at the world doesn't convince any more and bits of new reality fall into place. A recent graduate. Nicky, wrote to me recently and described how it happened to her. At the age of 18, given herself an atheist, she went to university and found out she was sharing a room with Christian {, and a cool, Christian on it! She was really friendly and bubbly and outgoing. I thought she was too trendy to do a square thing like-go to church!). Nicky got to know other Christians and asked their questions all the time. They were all so kind and loving and friendly-opposite to what I expected. Then Sarah suggested that I start praying and reading a little Bible every day. Again, I thought no way, but I soon started reading now and again-in secret-only when Sarah wasn't in the room [in her basement]. And you know that amazing book. Well, I don't have to tell you how the story ends, do I? These things happen all the time. Things don't fit: we meet a Christian with integrity and a sense of humor. We read a religious book that really makes sense. Surprising perception of life, people get a new perspective on Jesus. Not surprising, really, because Jesus is like Lauren! Telling us more clearly than anything else about the greater reality that is God, and on the first Good Friday broke away from us those who wanted to keep the lie. God is trying to get to us. In a world of appearance and unreality, or deception, manipulation and distrust, God says, There's more. I'm a rock, I'm a certain foundation. Base my life on me, I'm reality. Come on, come with me. I bring a new community into being where people learn to be real, take care of values that are not based on material things and advertising. I want you to be a part of it. But we have to respond. Christof admits: If [Truman] was absolutely determined to uncover the truth, there was no way we could prevent him... He can leave at any time. But it's not easy to follow this new reality. So the third metaphor I called: 3. Break out of the bubble There are two reactions to Truman's growing awareness of what's really going on. There is his own determination to get out, and the determination of the people around him not to let him. His wife Meryl, for example, says, Let me give you some help. You're not okay ... You have a nervous breakdown. Obviously. Society doesn't like deviants of any kind because they challenge the status quo. One answer is to interpret deviance as a disease, and treat it. On Truman's side, he's trying to get out. He's trying to leave by plane, but oddly enough, there's no plane for a month. He's trying to drive, and he's stopped by a fake accident at a nuclear power plant. He's caught on a bus to Chicago, and the driver deliberately takes off his gear so the bus can't leave. One thing no one expected was that he could try to leave with water, because everyone knew he was afraid of water. So he sails in a sailboat called-what else?-Santa Maria: like Columbus, he's about to discover a new world. And now the forces against him are quite violent. It still endures until it comes to the end of the world-literally. There, finally, Christof speaks to him. Christof asks: Truman, where are you going? And, of course, Truman doesn't know where it's going to be or what it's going to be like. Christof says: You belong here with me. He wants Truman to stay in a world that is safe and well-known and comfortable, in a world where freedom is an illusion and no one is real. It must be tempting for Truman. It won't be easy for him to fit into a bigger world. It is like an animal that has been in captivity all its life and is suddenly released into the wild. There are so many things you don't know about it, starting with a very basic about how they relate to ordinary people who are not professional actors! And then it will be painful—all we know for sure, all she knows for sure is that she will have the friendship and support of Lauren. There is a similar conflict when one seriously contemplates becoming a follower of Jesus. If you get involved, let me warn you there will be an opposition. Sometimes parents phone him is when they engage in religion. A child can be drunk every night, or they can be completely promiscuous, but parents aren't trying to get help on campus. But religion does, and on the most basic levels. Not surprisingly, Jesus warned against this conflict of reality. He said it was going to be hard. He said you have to be prepared for trouble. He said it could feel like death. After all, it means, like Truman, turning his back on security, entering an empire where for a time everything will seem new and strange-and it takes some getting used to. Is it worth it? Was it worth the risk to Truman? Yes. I would say, and millions would say, Yes, it's worth it. It means learning to be a real person because of the reality that comes from knowing the Friendship of the Creator. It means learning to be a real person because of the reality that comes from knowing the Friendship of the Creator. It means learning to be a real person in God's world in God's world in God's way. And that's the most amazing adventure a human being could ever have. Conclusion Two notes in conclusion, both from characters with jc initials. Jim Carrie said about this movie: The thing I find important about the film is the point of you not being happy with your life, it's time to go into the unknown. This is where you really get rewarded when you separate yourself from others' wishes and follow your own heart. Jesus Christ said to those who had just begun to trust him and follow him: If you stick to this, live from what I will tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience the truth for yourself, and the truth about his world that freed him. On a much larger level, of which Truman is just a pale metaphor, that's what we can discover too. The button Lauren is wearing in this scene in the library asks: How will it end? To remain trapped only with the reality that allows us to experience? Or break out into a greater reality in the friendship of God's creator? (Church at John, McMaster University 2001) 2001)