

Friday Night Theology, 12th June 2009.

Meeting Jesus

One of the more unlikely [poll findings](#) you could imagine was revealed this week from the team that brought us [Primeval](#). Three thousand people were asked which dead person they would most like to meet, and top of the list came Jesus Christ. A surprising one in three said they would like to meet him above anyone else. Those who organised the survey had fully expected Princess Diana, who came second, to head the list, but it was Jesus who apparently captivates the British public's hearts and minds the most.

A spokesperson was quoted as saying, "These results show that Jesus Christ will always be the British Public's 'Superstar'", which if you think about it, is truly remarkable. It must also be particularly galling to John Lennon fans who infamously claimed that the Beatles were 'more famous than Jesus'. Well not any more: Lennon didn't even make the top ten!

So what can we conclude from the fact that Jesus did top the poll, and what does that say to us in the church, whose main purpose is to introduce folk to him? In particular, does the fact that so many people want to meet him suggest we're not doing an especially good job at it? For if we were, the third of Britons that want to know him would presumably have already been introduced.

Two points arise from all this. The first is that to those who say the church is dying, that secularism has all we could ever want and that atheism can satisfy, we can easily point out that a large section of the British population would disagree. It's Jesus they want to meet, not Nietzsche or Bertrand Russell.

More importantly, the poll also indicates that despite our obsession with celebrity, there remains within the British soul a deep spiritual need which presumably people are looking to Jesus to meet. Of course, not all those who put Jesus top did so out of some kind of spiritual longing, but a significant proportion will have. Yet many of those people will be sceptical that the church is where that spiritual need can be met. To use a business analogy, the demand is high, it is just the package we're supplying that is the problem. They want to meet Jesus, just not if they have to go via Christians, and probably evangelical Christians in particular.

Hence, we need to be willing to ask some challenging questions about ourselves. What is it that we're doing that despite such evident spiritual hunger is putting people off? Why is it that they like Jesus but not the body commissioned to represent him? And what do we need to start doing differently in our communities and neighbourhoods to more authentically be the arms, legs, voice and heart of Jesus in the way that we are called to be? For surely that is what it means to be both the body of Christ and his ambassadors here on earth. And anyway, if we think about it, Jesus shouldn't even be on the list – he is after all alive and more than willing to get to know any member of the British public who wants to!

Justin Thacker, Head of Theology.