

## 1 John Chapter 4- v 20-21

<sup>20</sup>If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother or sister, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? <sup>21</sup>And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother and sister also.

How do you solve a problem like Derick Wilson? How do you hold a wave upon the sand? How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?

Superficially, the problem is practical. To the end, Derick was thinking up new ideas - nobody could think up a new initiative like Derick Wilson. Yet I have a sword of Damocles hanging over me – you have five minutes Duncan. I may have to steal a few more.

More importantly, though, how can I capture in mere words a man whose contribution was his spirit? A man whose spirit gave him a lifelong capacity to turn mundane moments into extraordinary meetings of discovery? A man who found beauty and possibility in his friends, when they saw only obstacles. A man who loved lightness - a party, a concert and a laugh - yet was also one of the deepest people I ever met.

Community was not a theory for Derick: it was what blossomed when he came into the room. If you want to know what hospitality and welcome look like beyond a textbook – emulate Derick. Derick and Dot brought it alive, as do each of his children and grandchildren, who he loved above all. And he brought it to his colleagues, his friends and all the people he worked with. His whole life, Derick was defined by his ability to align his professional life after what his heart knew, rather than the other way around.

He would be disbelieving that he was important in so many lives. In fact he never knew – and never claimed credit. Yet so many of us here, me included, will always be Derick's children. As a youth worker, as perhaps Northern Ireland's truest believer in reconciliation and as a social entrepreneur before anyone knew that phrase, Derick put the human into human being. He took the cheese out of the cheesy children's song and handed it back as lived experience: love is something if you give it away, you end up having more.

I knew Derick as an adult for 45 years - which I realise is longer than Frank Wright was alive. It goes back before that to this Centre in 1970 when I was 9, when Derick brought a pioneering, and to me scary, group of 'louts' from Sandy Row and Ballymurphy. I have this memory of Derick puffing on his inhaler in a cloud of smoke of untipped Park Drive

cigarettes trying to get teenagers to avoid sectarian chanting in the concert. He finally got one of them sing 'The Jug of Punch', and I can still remember the words.

But I really met him 9 years later, when Derick was Corrymeela Centre Director. It was the evening after my last A level and my mother suggested that I go to Corrymeela. I had to get a lift from Derick who was driving the Community Minibus up from Belfast. I recognized him by the inhaler - which he used copiously on the journey. Despite the June weather he was in a blue puffer jacket complaining about the cold. His first instruction was to insist that I left Grammar School behind and stop calling him Mr Wilson. I was catapulted into another world. That day was quite the day. My last exam had been interrupted by a bomb in the hotel less than two blocks from our exam room. The Marine Hotel in Ballycastle was destroyed on the same day. And Dessie McLarnon, the man who built much of Corrymeela was catapulted into the air and into hospital when the crane he was driving to hoist a Portakabin had collided with the overhead electric cable. Even worse, the carpet laid outside on the ground because the brand new Croi had flooded had been destroyed by a herd of cows who charged across it when escaping from the nextdoor field. Yet Derick spoke to me and was delighted I wanted to come to Corrymeela.

Once we arrived in Ballycastle, was clear that Derick was at the centre of it all: reassuring volunteers from all over, leading worship, visiting Dessie, welcoming people from every corner, sorting out the Croi and the carpet- while driving Dot mad because he was meant to look after Adam and Ben and had left them with one of the volunteers, and driving his secretary Margaret mad because she couldn't make head nor tail of his latest note. Yet he did it with such infectious honesty and energy, and it was clear that everybody loved him. Everybody covered for him because he was giving every ounce of himself to support them. Over the years, Derick's matchless commitment to open a home beyond borders for everyone who crossed the threshold defined Corrymeela. It is forty years since he stopped being employed in Corrymeela. I don't suppose we ever really recovered from Derick Wilson – or wanted to.

Derick had already moved to the Centre for the Study of Conflict in Coleraine when I got a job there in 1987. He hated dry academia: he was like a caged animal craving relationship not ideas. But among John Darby's remarkable rag-tag group of young researchers, Derick found a way not just to study conflict but to try to do something about it. On the one hand, he and Dot pioneered Mill Strand Integrated Primary in Portrush, and Derick was establishing inter-community youth work for NI. On the other he gathered together waifs and strays in Corrymeela. Roel Kaptein was already provoking Corrymeela to rethink reconciliation and the gospel, not always to everyone's delight. Frank Wright was a brilliant English political scientist who found community in

taking his learning and art to Corrymeela. I was the new kid. Derick was the puppet master.

It was Derick who pointed us in the direction of engaging directly with Northern Ireland's crisis. Derick knew people – unlike the rest of us, and they knew and trusted him. 'Understanding Conflict and finding ways out of it' was born - our crisply named project to see if what we had learned together here might be relevant to real lives and encourage change out there. One of several Corrymeela reconciliation break-outs, UCT was driven by Derick's certainty, learned at home and at the feet of Ray Davey, that a different world required a new spirit. As Kiho, one of our friends from Korea wrote to me this week: "Derick possessed an extraordinary sensitivity to the times and tirelessly pursued experiments in building communities that brought together people of diverse backgrounds through dialogue and inspiration. His humility, paired with his passionate engagement with the world, made him truly remarkable."

I had no idea what I was starting when I began working with Derick 35 years ago. On the way, we did many things: we spread our understanding of mimetic relationship to new audiences, we hosted difficult conversations, we wrote and spoke and listened. When Frank and Roel died, Derick found Karin, Libby, Aidan and Loretto and forged us into Future Ways. Derick was always the lynchpin, pushing us into new, sometimes bizarre, situations while always believing in possibility. Karin wrote this week of what a wonderful first boss Derick was – and his gift of intuitively recognizing the gifts of others. Libby and Aidan 'got' local community. Karin is one of the brightest and most unusual minds of her generation. Loretto grasped that Derick's big project was something worth working for.

Derick maybe couldn't write for toffee but he knew what we had to say and do. And we ended up working with big organizations and politicians - Local Government, the NHS, Sports Council, NIACRO... the list is long. And promoting our concepts of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence rooted in the relationality of Corrymeela rather than laws or political correctness. And then along came that other mad, driven, Corrymeela pilgrim, Brendan McAllister, who co-opted us into his work with the Police and Criminal Justice system.

Some might have stopped there, but not Derick. His passion for reconciliation, encouraging young people and those at the bottom of the social pyramid, led him to pioneer restorative practices with Hugh Campbell. At 70 he won a Fulbright to Texas, where his passion for relationship-building arrived like a tornado. In the polarising sands of modern America, Derick found another audience for his gospel of hope and relationship. Meanwhile, he teamed up with Jin who picked up from Derick the certainty

that peace only really lived in human relationships, and planted it in, of all places, Korea. And so, at Derick's insistence, Jin, Jean and I became another team – Nurturing Hope, which stands in my mind as Derick's last instruction to us all.

Derick was at his best when he trusted his heart. His heart knew what he was looking for even when he couldn't articulate it. He was always on the look-out for others who could explain to him what he already knew. Although a pioneer, he hated being alone. His heart saw that other people were not his enemy but potentially his lifeblood. So he made community. And he knew that learning and really new knowledge arose in meetings which started from trust and curiosity. So he looked for ways to make that happen, and people to make it happen with.

Derick Wilson was in revolt against his confining evangelical church roots for much of his life. He hated piety. Yet he was also the most persistent follower of Jesus. Through Ray and Roel, we crawled our way together to a gospel which transformed our lives: and became our driving purpose. Derick, above all people I have ever met, knew that in the end only three things matter – faith, hope and love.

Through community in Corrymeela, we wrestled to a God in whom there is no violence, only healing love, where our lives depend on forgiving and being forgiven, on restoring and being restored, on serving and being served and on meeting and being truly met. This was the Corrymeela that Derick Wilson responded to and always went back to it. To the depths of his soul he lived from forgiving, restoring, serving and opening doors.

His life, and your presence here, tells me that you were touched by those things. Corrymeela begins when you leave. Derick has left us, but I know with absolute certainty, that even though he has left us physically, he has left mark so indelible on mine and on so many hearts that it will remain alive with and in us for as long as we live. That's what he meant by nurturing hope, restoring relationships and making a way into the future.

We, or I, should not try to solve a problem like Derick Wilson. I am eternally grateful for him and to him. He only insists that we keep walking the way.

<sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.