

Changing one heart at a time

“But let us not put our sights too high. We do not have to be saviours of the world! We are simply human beings, enfolded in weakness and in hope, called together to change our world one heart at a time.” – *Becoming Human*, Jean Vanier

Jean Vanier, through his actions, called us to become human. He spent his life changing one heart at a time and in doing so his heart was also changed.

Through his encounters with the poorest and weakest in society, in particular those with mental disabilities Jean discovered, “God has chosen the weak to confound those closed up in their heads.” He felt “normality” stunted freedom and complicated the enjoyment and simplicity of becoming human. He knew we had much to learn and much to gain from journeying with those the world had shut out and locked in.

When Jean set up L'Arche in the Summer of 1964 by inviting two men with mental disabilities, Raphaël and Philippe, to live with him in a small cottage in the French village of Trosly-Breuil, he was being transformed by them. In his own words they were his “teachers of tenderness”. Through their virtues of “wonderment, spontaneity and directness” they enabled Jean to begin to live from his heart.

For Jean he realised he simply enjoyed himself more “with people who are a bit crazy. And our people are a little bit crazy. What do I mean by that? I mean they are not bothered by the need to conform – to be dressed as they should, to do as they should. I don't want to be part of a world where everyone has to be the same, and to win – ‘I succeed, therefore I am’.”

His wise counsel went hand in hand with an extraordinary gift of attentiveness and listening. And always his fundamental desire was the same – to help people believe that, no matter what they might have done, they were loved by Jesus “more than they dare believe”. Life in L'Arche, Jean said, had taught him “that everybody is beautiful. Everybody”.

He challenged people to start in small ways, by making space in their lives for somebody who was



lonely, old, depressed, handicapped. He liked to quote Mother Teresa's response when a journalist once told her that what she and her sisters were doing was just a drop in the ocean: “The ocean is made up of drops.”

One small
step, one small act
will create a ripple. You
may not always see the effect
from the middle of the pond,
but it's there. Drop some love,
laughter and kindness into
the water and see what
happens....

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*In gratitude for and in memory of Jean Vanier,
born Geneva, 10 September 1928; died Paris, 7 May 2019.*

During the week of Jean Vanier's 90th birthday he shared a video to commemorate the occasion and in doing so gifted us with the following rules:

Ten rules for life to become more human

1. Accept the reality of your body
2. Talk about your emotions and difficulties
3. Don't be afraid of not being successful
4. In a relationship, take time to ask “How are you?”
5. Stop looking at your phone. Be present!
6. Ask people “What is your story?”
7. Be aware of your own story
8. Stop prejudice: meet people
9. Listen to your deepest desire and listen to it
10. Remember that you'll die one day

To view this wonderful video click here: youtu.be/wtyX_nXbTx4

REFLECTION

- > Jean Vanier challenges us to act in small ways. How can you make space in your life to include someone who needs a friend?

Reference: www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/15929/jean-vanier-everybody-is-beautiful-everybody-

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