Remembering Jesus: Soul Survivor and Sacramental Singing



We've just been to Soul Survivor. For the uninitiated, it's a Christian youth festival, held as five separate weeks in various places around the UK. We went to the last week in Shepton Mallet, Somerset together as a family with our church youth group and with 6,500 other people.

It was fantastic. Uplifting, moving, healing, restorative, life-giving, fun, peaceful, worshipful.

But I had an initial concern that it would be all about the hype and the froth. I had had a passing observation of Soul leader, Mike Pilavachi, and he has, shall we say, a *large* personality. Would the big top and the light show make it just another spiritualised buzz for young people, to dry up like the mud in the fields as the tents are pulled down and the cars drive away?

It wasn't like that. While rightly being the centre of attention at times, Mike, when it mattered, constantly put the attention back to Jesus. He was not afraid to turn off the light show and simply ask people to pray in quietness. People weren't asked to come forward to receive ministry from the big holy guru, but to simply to pray for and care for one another. I saw people moved with contrition, with love, with peace, with joy.

And there *was* music. Lots of it. Some loud, some repetitive, some light, some profound. It carried people away without getting carried away, if you know what I mean. And while the lyrics were not 18th Century theological treatises, they were meaningful and biblical.

It reprised me with an ongoing thought I've had about charismatic worship of this kind, the sort that's done well. What does it *do?*

Firstly, it expresses an obedience to the Scriptural injunction to build one another up with *"songs, hymns, and spiritual songs" and to "sing and make music from your heart to the Lord."*

Secondly, there is a sense of expectation that this form of worship is an *effective* means of encountering the grace of God in particular, life-giving ways. This is the charismatic sense in which the worship incorporates prayer, healing, restoration, and a growing intimacy with the Holy Spirit.

These are two marks that characterise sacraments. The two canonical Sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are done in obedience and are an effective administration of God's grace. We encounter God in the Sacraments, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Musical worship is *not* a Sacrament, but in this sense it is *sacramental*. In the midst of musical worship we can encounter the grace of God in a particular way as the Holy Spirit ministers to us.

What struck me at Soul Survivor however, was another aspect of this. The two Sacraments also have the characteristic of being a *memorial,* in the broad sense of the word of "an aid to memory." Jesus commands that the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine and the sharing together should be done *"in remembrance of me."*

As I watched over six thousand young people singing about Jesus it was clear, by this they were *remembering* him, and they were remembering who they are *in* him. It was truly a memorial. It was kerygmatic. It was a connection with and a proclamation of the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

And my prayer is this: that as the young people dispersed into their year, that they would take the remembering of these songs, this worship experience, with them. In whatever stresses and strains they experience, that they would be led to *remember Christ* there, away from the big top, in the midst of reality. That they would do life *in remembrance of him*, and so bear much fruit for his glory. Amen.