

Denial – a steadfast refusal to acknowledge the facts – is most often associated with alcoholics and addicts. I had my own battle with that: In my mid-twenties, I went for an assessment at an alcoholic unit. While waiting to be seen, I picked up a leaflet entitled “20 things that happen to alcoholics”. After reading it carefully, I left – convinced I didn’t have the problem. I’d only experienced 18 of those 20 things, so I must be OK. The two I hadn’t experienced were “serious brain damage” and “death”...either of which would have made it somewhat difficult to read the leaflet.

A friend of mine was equally good at denial: every morning he would be ill with withdrawal symptoms, but he’d blame it on last night’s curry. He’d drink huge quantities of cider, and then stagger to the take-away. Sometimes he’d wake up the next day face down in a chicken madras. (I *never* did anything remotely as distasteful as that – it was always lamb vindaloo with me) “I’ve really got to leave off this curry thing,” he would say....but never did. It provided him with an explanation for his sickness...one which didn’t threaten his drinking.

Another guy was sure his problem was that he liked the ladies too much: “It’s making a real mess of my life, and the wife’s had enough”, he said....conveniently forgetting that he didn’t even have the courage to talk to a woman when he was sober. He told me he’d sometimes wake up in a strange bed, and there’d be someone curled up beside him, under the duvet. And then he’d get filled with despair and cry out to God. That sounded hopeful, so I asked him what he prayed. He told me: “Please God, don’t let it be a *man* under the duvet!”

Denial, though, is pretty much universal. If the truth is unpalatable, people can always change the truth. Politicians often excel in this field of human endeavour: Those in power pretend things are fine when they are not, while those who oppose them pretend things will be fine when *they* get into power. I feel a little guilty about that: despite all the money and effort they put into ‘spin’, I am still unable to believe *any* of it. I really must try harder.

One guy who could never be accused of denial was Enver Hoxha, erstwhile dictator of Albania. He once broadcast his New Year message to the nation along the following lines: “This year will be worse than last year, but not nearly as bad as next year”. But Hoxha was more secure in his post than our MPs - he consistently got over 100% of the available votes. Even so, there was occasional dissent - one man was sentenced to 25 years for writing an unflattering poem about him. They also amputated his lower limbs...a clear statement that those who challenge the regime won’t have a leg to stand on. I think I prefer our system – even with the denial.

Jesus is big on the plain, unvarnished truth....which doesn’t always go down too well. People don’t like to hear they are hypocrites, or that they’ll see heaven on the day they can pass a camel through the eye of a needle. They don’t want to know that even some miracle-workers won’t make the grade, and they certainly don’t want to think about the cost of following Christ. So - many of them go into denial: They either pretend he doesn’t exist, or they pretend his only requirement is the occasional trip to church. In doing so, they ignore something else Jesus said – “the truth will set you free”. *That* key to a better life now (and a much better future) is just as pertinent to the guy in the street, as it is to the guy who sleeps in his curry.