



## Good News – Summer 2005

Recently, my two teenage sons bullied me into watching *Stuck on You*, a comedy about conjoined twins Bob and Walt played by Matt Damon and Greg Kinnear. I was less than keen, having seen about 15 minutes of another Farrelly brothers film before and deciding that I had an urgent appointment with some slug management in the garden. Still, I decided to give *Stuck on You* a go for the sake of peace.

So: two brothers have no choice but to do everything together. One is shy, unambitious and falls in love, the other wants to be an actor and enjoy the bright lights of Hollywood. Eventually they decide that they must go their separate ways and that means surgery to give them separate and, for the first time, private lives.

It is here that something began to attract my attention. Once separated, they become truly disabled. They have trouble walking. They both fall over. Walt cannot act properly without his brother's support in the stunt moves. Bob cannot cook in his diner because he misses his brother's culinary double act. Moreover, they are lonely and unhappy without each other. The most poignant scene comes where Walt sits next to a statue of a man reading on a park bench and sidles up to it, inserts his body into his familiar conjoined position and relaxes. Later Cher, his co-star, finds him sobbing on the statue's chest. How will Walt and Bob learn to stand on their own two feet?

The film ends with the two brothers back together in the diner, belted together in their familiar positions and happy again. Walt goes back to acting for his loving, local community, but what matters is that his brother is in the audience watching, encouraging, helping, not holding back.

To my children, this film spoke powerfully because they are like Walt and Bob. They laughed when the brothers brawl on the ground, unable to duff each other up properly because they are joined together. They cried when Walt cried on the statue's shoulder because, even when they have a bust up and storm off to their separate rooms, I will find them later sleeping in the same room, even if one is curled up in a sleeping bag at the end of the other's bed.

So this film asks us something about relationships, what it means to be together and what happens when we have to let go, to be apart. For my children it raises questions of how they grow up and leave this family. What will happen to their relationship when they have families of their own? Like Bob in the film, being alone can be a novelty and idea of possibility and freedom that soon palls without the rhythms of partnership, co-working and community.

And it strikes me that we can be like this with God and with the Church. We can grow up with the sense that God is always there, that we are grafted on to the organic life of the church community, until we begin to resent its presence, see faith as a hindrance, holding us back. So there comes a point when we can want to go our own way, be separated from God, and not have God looking over our shoulder all the time and knowing all that we do. The Christian life we have inherited can sometimes become suffocating and we want to be free.





But the freedom leaves a God-shaped hole that can disable us entirely, and like Walt, we can come to realise that we have to fill in the part of us that's gone missing. Many of the people I've met who have had some kind of Christian background have found themselves spiritual statues, cold and lifeless imitations of the living God and make do. But in the end people often have to find a new accommodation and relationship with God, one where we are supported and sustained, encouraged and commissioned to be who we truly are, not bolted on, but let be.

In the film is it selfish, self-obsessed, manipulative Cher who finally becomes evangelist, telling Walt to go and find his brother and be with him. And she too is there, supporting, when Walt and Bob remake their relationship and Walt is up there on stage singing for joy with Meryl Streep no less. So, unlikely as it might seem, one of our tasks in mission is to be like Cher (!) helping others to deal with the notion of a suffocating Christian faith who won't let us be free and to recognise the people cuddled up to statues with pain in their hearts. And it is up to us to show forth a relationship with a living God who loves, supports and encourages us truly to become whole people, whoever and wherever we are.

**Anne Richards 2005**

