

## MOSAIC CONFERENCE

### **‘WHO MOVED MY CHEESE?’**

Author: Dr Spencer Johnson

This book is about 4 characters who had to deal with difficult changes in their lives. The author describes the story as ‘an amazing way to deal with change in your work and in your life’.

Cheese is a metaphor for what we want to have in life – job, relationship, money, big house, freedom, health, peace etc.

These four characters look for this cheese in a maze. The maze represents where you spend time looking for what you want. This can be the organisation, your work, your community you live in, or your relationships.

I want to suggest that the cheese that we are looking for is full inclusion of everyone in the CofE at all levels of our life. This has significant implications for BAME, Gay and Transsexual folks in the Church.

#### **The Characters:**

2 were mice – Sniff & Scurry

2 were Little people – small as mice but who looked and related like people - Hem & Haw

**Theme:** Find the cheese and you will be your nourished, and make you fulfilled and happy. Often, we need to embrace change to find this cheese!

Cheese was made available every day at a particular time at a certain place in the Maze. The four characters were generally happy with this arrangement. However, one day it did not

appear. Sniff & Scurry went searching elsewhere where they found more cheese and they seemed reasonably happy.

Hem and Haw pitched every morning to the same place expecting to find their supply of cheese. Eventually their supply runs out and the cheese stopped appearing. They came day after day expecting to see their piece of cheese waiting for them, but to no avail.

After much agonising Haw decided to leave the spot and search for cheese elsewhere. Hem resisted and wanted to know ‘Who moved my cheese?’.

Hem has this attitude of entitlement and expectation that things will always remain the same – he would arrive each morning at the specific place and his supply of cheese would be there. When the supply ran out he became angry, upset and would not change his mind about how to acquire cheese differently. There was only one way for him – the cheese must be there for him at the time and place that it was always there!

He stayed where he was, angry, frustrated and standing by his sense of entitlement. He refused to move on and search for new supplies, unlike Haw!

When we reflect on issues of racism in the Church of England and in our society, we need to hear what other global south theologians are saying. Here is Dr Alan Boesak, South African Theologian who says:

“South Africa, with its draconian policies of apartheid, declared by the international community a ‘Crime against Humanity,’ and by the ecumenical movement, led by the World Communion of Reformed Churches a sin, a travesty of the gospel, and its theological justification a heresy, - still one of the Reformed Communion’s finest moments – had set the world a particularly vicious model of racial oppression and

discrimination, injustice and exploitation.” So much so that we may speak today of a phenomenon called “global apartheid” which includes socio-economic exploitation and inequalities, political and social exclusion, racial and ethnic discrimination, as well as gender injustice and heteronormative oppression. The common denominator here is not only the racial element but rather the systemic, violent, pervasive, and totalitarian nature of that oppression.”

Boesak is saying that racism has other elements of exclusion on an international scale and is a worldwide systemic problem and needs addressing on a global level. We know for certain that it is not just a Church of England issue but also a problem throughout the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.

So, as we reflect on the story of cheese we need to ask the question: are our lives are like the mice, or like Hem or Haw.

Are we able to acknowledge our fears of systemic change and face them, and recognise the need to move to a different place and explore things in a new way?

Are we willing to embrace change from white privilege to the inclusion of all people in society and the life of the Church?

The truth of the story is that if we resist change then we will surely remain stagnant, become irrelevant, and eventually perish and die. Exclusion of people will always invite protests like we saw last summer in the USA and in the UK.

The same can be said of the Church at a local or national level. Often Churches that have not embraced change have indeed closed down. We know that many young people shun organised religion because they feel it is boring, dull and irrelevant in the way it relates to the modern world and the challenges they face.

This is the Church of Hem. If we identify with Hem, then we will resist changing our policies and plans, resist the need to change and perish because of our sense of entitlement, anger and resentment. And our refusal to share the table with everyone.

If we identify with Haw we will recognise the need to change our direction and search in different places for the cheese. We will acknowledge that it is fearful to change direction and move into the unknown. We will also recognise that we have no option if we are to be nourished and to flourish and experience new joy and happiness which comes with full inclusion, equality and justice for all. Haw found new supplies of a varieties of cheeses because he was willing to venture out into the unknown. This is what faith is really all about – walking by faith and not by sight.

In terms of the issues that we are struggling with as a Church where is the CofE in terms of full inclusion in terms of race, culture, sexuality, etc. are we like the mice who went searching much earlier and were content with the new sources of cheese they found, albeit small amounts of cheese suited to their tastes?

Or are we like Hem, resisting change of every sort, continuing to hold onto old entitlements, prejudices, and exclusions? Surely this makes for a miserable, angry, boring Church!

Perhaps we can be like Haw who ventured out in faith and found new meaning and joy because he faced his fears and embraced change. He continued to flourish and enjoy life and all its beauty and joy.

We face the danger of perishing and becoming irrelevant if we don't embrace change. The cheese is available to all who are willing to search in new ways and new places for it.

There are many who cannot see that their cheese has become mouldy and totally rotten and unfit for human consumption. This rotten cheese is found in our racism, sexism, exclusion of gay or transsexual sisters and brothers.

Insisting on waiting for 'our' or 'my' cheese is a recipe for disaster and will lead to organisational death and destruction. Nobody has 'moved' your cheese – your cheese has simply become rotten, mouldy and tasteless. And it has disappeared.

Joy, new life. Mutual flourishing. Inclusion, Justice. Unity. is the cheese that God calls us to enjoy! Let's join Haw in this journey to the amazing cheese of the Kingdom of God!