The gospel according to Susan Boyle

We need to see people through God’s lens, writes Andrew Dodd.

WHAT does the Susan Boyle phenomenon say to us about the world in which we live and the way in which we treat people?

I put this question to a number of primary school classes this week after showing them the absorbing YouTube clip of her debut performance of Cher’s ‘I Got You Babe’.

What is the appeal of this engaging piece of theatre that has rocketed the middle-aged frumpy never been kissed woman from obscurity in an unknown village in the back of beyond to international fame and the entire world talking of town in the global village?

I think it is part shock, part surprise; the fairytale element; the emotional roller-coaster ride and the judges and audience (including ourselves) eating humble pie.

We live in a closely connected visual world in which a Susan Boyle can go from zero to stardom before you can say chick-chick-chik! And who had heard of either just a few weeks ago?

As the clip is so absorbing the actual words she says can get lost in the ride. In many ways Susan Boyle was living out the very words she had heard from Les Misernables: ‘I dreamed a dream in time gone by. When hope was high and life worth living. I dreamed that love would never die. I dreamed that God would be forgiving.’

Here was the 47-year-old with apparently no hope of fulfilling her childhood dream set dreaming herself up for a huge and public fall. Then when the song slowed and changed key and the audience held their collective breath to see if she could manage the low notes it seemed that the reality of TV was being lived out.

Reportedly affected from oxygen deprivation at birth, she was called ‘Simple Susan’ at school. Surely the dream had been well and truly knocked out of her years ago by the realities and hardships of life. But the tears come at night. With their voices soft as thunder As they tear your hope apart And they turn your dream to shame.

The initial ridicule she had already endured from the judges and audience was perhaps the way Susan Boyle had been treated all her life.

How often do our prejudices and worldviews quash the dreams and hopes of others?

The Susan Boyle story is one that challenges us deeply. Perhaps the whole voutenoise episode gives us some insight into how God sees us.

Andrew Dodd is a pastor at Hamilton Baptist Church and chairman of the Churches Media Association.

The Lord does not see as humans see; he looked at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

As many schoolchildren told me, ‘You can’t judge a book by its cover.’ However, what if Susan Boyle’s performance matched her looks and she sang exactly as we had expected her to?

She would have been laughed off the stage and ridiculed all the way back to obscurity in her unknown village.

But that would not be right. God made us in his image – we have value because we are human. We need to see and treat people through the lens through which God sees us and treat them accordingly.

Andrew Dodd was a pastor at Hamilton Baptist Church and chairman of the Churches Media Association.

This climate change thing is getting down to the nitty-gritty.

Last week the Minerals Council released a report claiming that the Rudd Government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme would cost the mining and minerals industries 23,510 jobs by 2020 and 60,000 jobs by 2030.

This caused mining unions boss Tony Maher to respond angrily. Mr Maher claimed mining jobs would grow in number even with a CPRS. Local member for Charlton and Mr Rudd’s climate change Mr Fixit, Greg Combet, also gave the Minerals Council a serve.

It was a good stoush. Clearly the big boys are taking the jobs and climate change debate seriously. There is much at stake.

The best comments of the week, though, came from the Climate Institute. The institute has commissioned a study to identify new and proposed projects in the renewable energy sector. As we shift away from coal fired power stations, the study asked what jobs will be available from clean-energy projects – things like solar energy facilities, wind farms, hydro schemes and biomass plants for the collection of methane gas from landfills. And why only ask where will these jobs be?

They have put the study on their institute’s website along with a nifty map where you can zoom in and locate the renewable energy projects destined for your local patch.

The study identified 905 renewable energy projects across Australia, some existing projects to be built. These will create 29,500 jobs by 2020. About 15,000 of these jobs, they estimate, will be construction jobs, though, will be construction jobs, about 15,000 of these jobs, they estimate, will be construction jobs, when these 505 plants are built, only 546 workers will be employed in them to keep them running. Do they?

Currently, the Hunter has six hydro-electricity stations, a steelworks, two wind turbines, one at Singleton, a biomass plant at Awaba and two wind turbines, one on Kooragang Island and another at the CSIRO Energy Centre at the Steel River industrial estate. In total these facilities employ only six workers.

So how will the Hunter fare in getting a share of these renewable energy jobs?

As far as actual plants are concerned, the outlook is modest. Currently, the Hunter has six renewable energy projects that are up and running. These are the hydro-electricity stations at Glenhaven and Chischester dam, a small solar collection facility at Singleton, a biomass plant at Awaba and two wind turbines, one on Kooragang Island and another at the CSIRO Energy Centre at the Steel River industrial estate. In total these facilities employ only six workers. Not many is it?

The proposed new projects are wind farms at Nowlands Gap near Muswellbrook and at the Kaye Energy Park near Scone, and a solar power plant at Liddell power station near Muswellbrook. In total these projects will generate NIFTY: The Climate Institute’s map of renewable energy projects.

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Topics today

Today’s fact

The chesirean angulicata tortoise is so aggressive it has been named the ‘fighting tortoise’.

Today’s word

Mana (mānā): Power; authority; prestige; supernatural or magical power.

It happened today

From our files: 1966: Strikes by workers at the Newcastle Abattoir and Maitland processing plant were making a concerted effort to interrupt the meat supply in Newcastle.

Today in history

1858: The first transported convicts arrive in Western Australia when 75 prisoners disembark from the Scindian. On board is 10-year-old George Troussel, a son of a guard, who is destined to become the second premier of Western Australia.

1948: First use of aircraft in combat by ships of the Royal Australian Navy in the Heligoland Bight. Aircraft are launched from HMAS Sydney and HMS Melbourne to intercept two German aircraft.

1941: In World War 2, British forces are finally withdrawn from Crete with heavy losses. Almost 3000 Australians are also lost in the evacuation.

1944: BBC Radio censored word message to warn French Resistance that D-Day invasion is imminent.


Born today

Marilyn Monroe, pictured, US actress (1926- ); Alanis Morissette, Canadian singer (1974- ); James 1:19, UK rock group; James 1:19, UK rock group; Jason Donovan, Australian singer (1968- ); Morgan Freeman, US actor (1937- ).

Odd spot

An army of 5000 blokes put a smile back on the face of recession-weary locals by staging a festival at the weekend despite forecasts that people generally do have more fun. The Blonde Weekend included a parade by blondes through the streets of the capital Riga, and a golf tournament only open to blonde women.

Today’s text

Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1:19