FOOTBALL ISN'T COMING HOME

Posted on July 5, 2018 by Eddie

Football moved out and set up house around the world; so did the church.
Category: Observations

In case you missed it, England won a game of football this week. To be honest, it's a pretty big deal, not only have we progressed to the last 8 of the World Cup for the first time in an age, we did so by winning a penalty shoot-out for the first time ever (assisted by a good Mackem goal-keeper, I should add). Never ones to miss a chance to be caught up in over-enthusiasm, England fans are confidently predicting that we will now win the World Cup and that Football Is Coming Home!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJqimlFcJsM&frags=pl%2Cwn

Modern football did originate in England. The rules were codified by the Football Association in 1863. The awful term "soccer" (it should be football, or footy - never soccer) is a contraction of Association Football, the term which was used to distinguish it from other forms of football, such as Rugby. However, whatever its roots, football is a truly international sport today. It has been taken up by other nations who have breathed new life and new enthusiasm into it. Whether it is the genius of Pele and the Brazillian national team, the enthusiasm of kids in China, or the exuberance of the Senegalese goal celebration, football is now truly international.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1ONtw17oMA&frags=pl%2Cwn

The thing is, football left home a while ago, not only that it set up house around the world. Football isn't coming home, it is there already. The English might have given football to the world and it may be that we'll even win the World Cup, but the game isn't ours any longer. It's grown up, settled down and made lots of new friends.

So, why am I going on about footy? I don't even follow the game apart from a brief spasm of sadness on Saturdays when I learn that Sunderland have lost again. I think there are some lessons here for our attitude to Christianity.

It is tempting to think that because the world mission movement started in the Western world, that Christianity somehow belongs to the West. Ignoring the fact that the Christian faith and the Bible originated a long time ago in a country far, far away, we assume that ours is the natural form of Christianity - that its home is in our part of the world. However, just like football, the Christian faith

has spread around the world, making its home wherever it goes. New expressions of the faith, new enthusiasms, new ways of worship and evangelism are springing up wherever the church takes root. Not only that, but just as much of the rest of the world seems to play football better than we do, these days, so the church is growing across the globe, while it is in recession here. The truth is that if the British church is to play a role in what God is doing across the globe in the twenty-first century, we are going to have to start learning from our brothers and sisters around the world. We'll always be British, but we can learn from others and bring new insights to bear to our context.

This might sound radical, but if the England football team can actually practice and prepare for a penalty shoot-out, the church can learn from the rest of the world too.