

Back to Church – Come as you are Sunday 2009

In the name of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit - AMEN

Today's Sunday has been called "Come as you are Sunday" – and Bishops in the Church of England have been doing many things to give today a significance. The Bishop of Reading has ridden his motorbike in his cathedral and caused quite a stir, and there have been many similar things done. Here in Manchester there has been a travelling advertisement around the City Centre streets and the Diocesan Web site has pictures of this.

Now the Bishop of Reading had the advantage of being noticed on his bike – and could no doubt make himself noticed as he "**revved up**" in more ways than one on the streets of his city. The Diocese of Manchester could have taken notice of the advertising aimed at Students this week and installed – are they called woofers speakers or something? You know those speakers with heavy bass tones – they used to be called woofers – the ones which seem to shake the foundations of the buildings, and as the advertisement moved up and down Deansgate there could have been music played to attract folk into Church today.

We pride ourselves on being a welcoming Church – and we are trying to be as inclusive and accepting as we always are this morning. In our Gospel reading – the reading about Zachaeus that we have just heard we are reminded of several things.

Jesus is on the lookout for people who are trying to find him – Zachaeus – a small man climbs a tree to get a look at Jesus. Despite being in a large crowd, despite being busy and distracted Jesus not only sees him, he invites himself to stay at his home.

Jesus is on the lookout for folk who are trying to find him today – and it is our job as the people in the Church to not be distracted, to not be too busy, to not be playing to large crowds: but, to find and to welcome people into the Church Family. We must always be on the lookout for people who want to get a better look at Jesus and we have to remember that the first thing that they will see and encounter is us.

When I first came to St Chrysostoms it was because I was looking for something, I wanted to get a better look at Jesus. To do so I didn't climb a tree, but I did go on line – perhaps the 21st Century equivalent of climbing a sycamore tree. My web search was for an Anglican Church which was welcoming and inclusive in Manchester. I think that they were my search terms and St C's came up. People will find us here for many differing reasons – the list is endless, and they will find folk who will do their best to reflect Jesus and to demonstrate God's love for them.

I don't know how many of you remember Come Dancing – that TV show in the 60's and early 70's not the Strictly version we have today. The women would get dressed up in yards of silk and taffeta, with thousands of sequins hand sown onto the garment. The commentator would be at pains to tell us about how wonderful they all looked and how hard Aunty Joan or Grandma Peggy had worked doing all the sewing – all before colour TV and we didn't realise the full effect of the glamour. With our colour TV of today we can sit back and watch – if you have the stomach for it – the "strictly" version on our screens at the moment. Today is come as you are, even strictly come as you are – there is no need for yards of silk and taffeta, no need to dress up or behave in strange ways. No need to think about clothes, fashion, hairstyle, colour, size. It doesn't matter whether you are single, partnered or married, sexuality or gender – they're not important. God's love is all embracing.

Zachaeus was a tax collector – an official of the state who was despised by the Jews. We also learn from the Bible reading that he was a man of integrity, and honesty. These are two virtues which we can all possess, and Jesus can use us and be with us. It is often said that Church is a school for sinners not a club for saints - it is something that I first heard many years ago, and often quote. We

learn from each other and we get support as any students do from each other as we learn as sinners enjoying studying and experiencing God.

We are able to come to church as we are - as you and me – without pretence, because Jesus is inclusive and accepting.

Jesus comes among us and we can touch and feel him – in prayer, in Bible readings, as we exchange The Peace, above all at the altar in bread and wine.

We come to Jesus out of curiosity like Zachaeus , we come to find out more.

We pride ourselves on being welcoming – we’re all here together this morning. But I have two things to confess.

- You will have realised that I’m incredible shy – much better now than I once was- and I can’t be the only shy person here today. Let us make an effort to be especially welcoming and friendly with everyone this morning – let us make sure if we’ve been coming here for ages that it is somewhere that folk would like to come back to, if you are new here – make yourself known – especially to the clergy and Penny and Neil or me – none of us will bite and we would all love to get to know you.
- I’m terrible at remembering folk’s name so I should like to ask for an amnesty this morning – a fresh start for us all – don’t assume that anyone knows you or your name and feel free to grab someone and introduce yourself over coffee –assume nothing except that we all want to be friendly and welcoming.

AMEN

