

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : 10th Sunday after Trinity ~ August 20, 2017

Ask everyone who has been a Brownie or a Guide to put their hand up. That means that everyone else is a non-Brownie or non-Guide.

Ask everyone who has been a Cub or a Scout to put their hand up. That means that everyone else is a non-Cub or non-Scout.

What about everyone who is left-handed? Everyone who loves coco pops?

Some of you will, no doubt, have felt left out in that little exercise – particularly if you were never in the Uniformed Organisations, are not left-handed and don't like coco pops. You may well have felt that you were an outsider.

I felt like an outsider recently. I had to go to a Church where I had never been before, where everyone was seated facing each other and where all the regular attenders were in their own named seat. I really did not know where I should sit and there was no one to welcome me. I felt like a real outsider.

The woman in the Gospel reading was also a real outsider. She was from Canaan, a country which was the traditional enemy of God's ways – hence the hostile reaction of Jesus's disciples. And Jesus himself wasn't much more friendly himself to the woman, let's face it. But she stood her ground. She showed courage, perseverance, trust and hope, even in the face of the hostile reaction of Jesus and his disciples – so much so that she impresses him and touches his heart. Jesus is aware that he isn't free to do what she wants – hence their interesting conversation together which causes the woman's strong faith to shine through so that Jesus is finally able to do what she has asked – but we can almost hear the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders, muttering darkly about this increasingly popular teacher and healer as they watch his actions. His generosity in the face of the tenacity of the Canaanite mother's courage, perseverance, trust and hope was an example to all who witnessed it and so he relents and rewards her great faith by healing her daughter.

Over 2,000 years later, what we know is that the Good News of God through Jesus Christ is not limited to a particular group or nation but available for the whole world. Yet still the church in general can seem exclusive and not inclusive to many. For

Christians the test of faith will be shown not by what we say but by what we do, by the way we respond and act, especially towards other people.

A few months ago I can across these words of instruction upon meeting other people – **Smile. Meet. Interact. Listen. Encourage. SMILE.** Where did I come see this? Not in some self-improvement manual or book of theology – but pinned up in the staff room of a shoe shop! **Smile. Meet. Interact. Listen. Encourage.**

For Christians the test of faith will be shown not by what we say but by what we do, by the way we respond and act, especially towards other people and particularly to strangers. That well known religious group Slimming World has as its welcome mantra: “Strangers are friends we haven’t yet met”. Not a bad mantra for a church congregation either.

People often say what a warm, friendly, loving, and caring Church this is. But we must always make sure that in all our loving and caring we don’t unintentionally leave people out.

Think about that when you are chatting with people after church over coffee. Is there someone standing on their own? Can you draw someone you don’t know into the conversation? Do lose the inhibitions which seems to painfully afflict the British when faced with someone we don’t know – go up and introduce yourself and have a chat.

In that Church where I felt an outsider, I was very glad that somebody took me into the Hall for a coffee. Nobody should be made to feel an awkward outsider. But are there some people we do keep on the outside, even sub-consciously? Are there some people we deliberately avoid? Remember if you can your first visit to this Church! For many it would be as alien as going into a betting shop would be for most of us.

Remember above all - this wonderful thing we call ‘faith’ is not just for us but is for everyone. We are all called to bring blessing to others, to share it with others. It’s God’s love for us that brought us here and he still needs us to show his love to them.

Literally, to love them into the kingdom. Amen.