

Adverts for Faith!

[Jonah 3^{10-4end}; Psalm 145 1-8;] *Philippians 1^{21-end}*; *Matthew 20¹⁻¹⁶*

*Live in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.
(Philippians 1²⁷)*

A visiting preacher was called in at short notice and made the apologies of the person who should be preaching. He noticed that one of the panes of glass in the stained glass window was broken and covered over with cardboard and so likened himself to the cardboard - a poor substitute. One the way out of Church one of the congregation gave the dubious compliments: you are the real pane!

The greatest advert for the faith of the Church is when the people in the Church act like Christians!

When we bring a child to baptism he becomes part of the family of the Church, God's family. But Christianity is something that you need to grow into - which is why parents and godparents make specific promises that they will not tell but show Zhe'Ry what it is to be a Christian.

It isn't about doing the right things and avoiding the wrong things - anyone can obey rules. It is about the people we are and how much like Jesus we are becoming in our everyday living.

Let's attend to some basics about Gospel living:

- ✦ **Forgiven people:** the baptism service has a great deal about washing, of being forgiven. That releases us from being held hostage to our past or the people we once were. Forgiven people are people who are free. Forgiven people are people who forgive. That simple fact - the fact of forgiveness is so liberating it radiates from us and is picked up by those around us.
- ✦ **Secure people:** God knows. That makes all the difference in life: nothing happens that is outside God's control and nothing happens without a reason. It doesn't mean that life is perfect or that there aren't things that are difficult, but our conviction that God knows and God works everything out means that those around us see that as people of faith we don't panic and aren't dominated by fear. That makes a difference.

✦ **Joyful people:** yesterday there was a religious procession through Birmingham - it looked Hindu and Buddhist (not sure), but was led by a mechanical elephant with numerous bands and dancing in the street. It made people smile. Faith should make us joyful and that is infectious. It isn't superficial happiness (that is never mentioned in the Bible and is a response to external things) but a joy that bubbles up from within. A joyless faith needs trading in! A joyful faith is a celebration that infects others.

✦ **Hopeful people:** Paul coming to end, yet **For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.** That changes our perspective. It isn't talked about so often in Churches but is right at the heart of our faith: we look forward to being with God forever when this life is ended and that gives us hope.

Living as Christians isn't for special occasions, it is a daily experience - if it isn't, the hypocrisy is picked up by those around us (and as parents and godparents Zhe'Ry will pick up from those with whom he lives what matters to them by who you are and what you do).

It was Wesley who said that if someone became a Christian their cat or dog would know the difference!