

It's a privilege to be standing here to speak as we prepare for Zain's baptism. As he begins his new life as a member of Christ's family in the church, what will it mean for him to grow and serve God in the world - indeed, what does it mean for any of us to be members of this family, and serve God in the world?

Last weekend I was at the wonderful Greenbelt festival, along with many colleagues and members of this community, some for the whole weekend, some just for the day, some in Air BnB's, some of us camping .... It's an occasion of joy as we reconnect with friends, and with all that gives us hope in our faith, and lament as we speak honestly about the state of the world, especially the middle East. The theme this year was to do with hope, and time after time we were able to listen to speakers from very troubled places speak of how they find hope in God and the Christian community. One of those I listened to was the actor Adjoa Andoh, who plays Lady Danbury in the Netflix drama *Bridgerton*. She is an entertaining speaker, who spoke of the challenges of inclusivity in the acting profession as well as the church - for those of you who are interested, she is a Reader in the Church of England. And she described the very lavish period drama as remarkably inclusive, which was a surprise. But the thing she said which has continued to go around in my head was a mis-speak - telling the story of how she was supported by her community as a young single mother, she said, "it takes a child to raise a village." she took a little turn around the stage as she recognised that she had reversed the well known saying - but I took the different version to heart.

Children of all ages take us forward in our human journey. It's children that face us with ourselves, as we get tired, or irritable, or joyful. At Greenbelt, my grandson Arlo decided that rather than my giving him chips from my dinner, he should feed me instead ... it was a disorientating and messy reversal of the usual order of things. No, that's not right ... oh, hang on! Children push to articulate what's really important to us, as we try to explain our fundamental values to us. Children in a community bond us together, if we are invited to share in the tasks, sorrows and joys of caring for them - it's not just parents who are changed by children, we all are. They reveal what's actually going on inside. A child in the village - or in the Cathedral - can bring us closer to each other, closer to God ... closer to who we really are, for better or for worse. Without children in our community we are so much less than God wants us to be. So thank you, Zain, for joining this community, and thanks to your parents for sharing your beautiful life with us here.

One of the other speakers I went to hear was Jeremy Corbyn. We have a particular interest in him here in Coventry, because our local MP, Zarah Sultana, has recently left the Labour Party to form, "Your Party" with him. Zarah has often shared in events as part of our life in the Cathedral, and came to see us for a conversation only last week. Corbyn spoke of the values of inclusion, of the importance of the arts, and a number of things to which Christians in this community might readily subscribe. The thing that he said which has stayed with me, though was again something of a backwards way of looking at things, in my view. The interviewer asked him what he thought about faith, especially as someone who shared the same initials as our founder. Socialism and faith haven't always been easy bedfellows, he said. Corbyn responded that Christianity can perhaps be quite a good thing - it did "share many of Socialism's values!" I think I might put it the other way round - socialism can quite a good thing, as it shares many of Christianity's values. Which came first, do you think?

Christianity above all else is about creating a new community - a new village, with the values of Jesus Christ. A village with a commitment to inclusion, and a fundamental trust in God. Inclusion of all is only challenging when we think there isn't enough to go around. If we truly believe we have plenty and enough to share, then no-one needs to be excluded or kept away from what we have. Earlier in the summer I went to see a production of 'Hades Town', a musical based on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. The stand out song was sung by Hades, king of the underworld, with the lines, "why do we build the wall, my children, my children - we build the wall to keep us free - we build the wall to keep out the enemy. Why are they the enemy, my children, my children? The enemy is poverty, because they want what we have got ...".

Yet as Christians we rely not simply upon ourselves, and what we can get or keep for ourselves. We rely on God - it is trusting in God that enables us to be inclusive, not feeling the need to

protect ourselves, or for that matter God, from others. Free to share with others, and especially children. I don't want to be naive about this. There are times - as our friends in Ukraine, Gaza and Israel Palestine will remind us - that we do need to protect ourselves and our children. But this is not normal. Normal is being open handed, open armed, welcoming others as God has welcomed us.

And that takes me to our readings, and my third story about what I've been up to over the last few weeks since I last stood in this pulpit. I couldn't quite decide whether I wanted to speak about hospitality today, or leaders - our readings touch on both. So let's start with hospitality. "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers," writes the author of the letter to the Hebrews, "for by doing so some have entertained angels unawares." Offering hospitality is at the heart of middle Eastern culture, forged in desert conditions where travellers may depend on the welcome and generosity of strangers, and expect to offer it in return, as they are able. Oddly, hospitality often comes from a place of poverty, recognising that just as we depend on others, they may depend on us. The word springs from the word for 'stranger', and gives rise to the word for 'host'. I'm delighted, even a little proud, that the thing most commented by our visitors here - and this is a dangerous thing to say, in case for any reason it's not been true for you this morning - is the welcome they have received, both on Sundays and throughout the week. I trust you are all familiar with our famous welcome sign, tied to the railings and looking a little battered now, but sincerely meant. Please revisit it if you are able, if only for the unique line about ending up here because you got lost on the ring road!

Hospitality puts someone else rather than ourselves at the centre of our community, if only for a moment. Instead of the community always being shaped by the leader, it suggests it can be shaped by the visitor. Put others first, is the message of both of our readings. Just to come back for a moment to that first memorable statement from Greenbelt - it takes a child to raise a village; it takes a visitor to raise a Cathedral. If we cannot welcome and make space for a stranger, whom we can see, we fool ourselves when we believe we welcome God, whom we cannot see. And that welcome can shape us, as much as it shapes the stranger. And it can open us to God's future. Twelve years ago I was asked to offer hospitality to a visiting Dean and his family one Sunday lunchtime. I was living on my own in the Deanery, before Ricarda joined me in Coventry, and I mostly just want to snack and sleep after Sunday morning, but I felt obligated. That visit from a Dean and his family from New Zealand led to an invitation to travel, first with a cross of nails, and then on several subsequent occasions, to the creation and recovery of old friendships, to a new life for our daughter 11,500 miles away ... all because of one, reluctant, exercise of hospitality. That's the other place we visited this summer, as many of you know - renewing personal and professional relationships and being freshly inspired by a beautiful, broken and yet hopeful country where 150 year old wounds are slowly being healed.

And so finally to leaders. What will Zain's leaders be like, I wonder? Will they be there for his sake, or will they want him to be there for theirs? Will they live to serve his good, or seek to cajole him to serve theirs? There's quite a bit about leaders in our two passages today. The passages are both a little odd, in the way that they sample verses from their respective chapters in the Bible - that always makes me curious about what those who compile our Sunday lectionary have chosen to miss out, even to protect us from! Hebrews is a strange letter anyway, full of symbolism which is hard to unravel. Chapter 13 is the last chapter in the letter, something of a postscript to the rest, which has been a majestic presentation of the divinity and rule of Christ, reminiscent of our own tapestry. This last section is described by my commentary as the parish notices, reminding people to be nice to each other - and the omitted verses, following the beautiful, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" are a slightly confusing recapitulation of some of what was said earlier in the letter, to do with the technicalities of sacrifice. What we are given this morning includes just a brief note about remembering leaders, with what might sound like a word of caution, "consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." It doesn't include verse 17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls." Like many of you, perhaps, I've been watching the BBC documentary about the abuses in the Jesus Army. Leaders are always to be held accountable: and it will often, tragically, be children who reveal the true nature of leaders. It takes a child to raise a village - and to hold it to account.

Jesus, in Luke 14, also turns the tables on those respected leaders with whom he sits at table. The missed out verses in this passage are the story of the woman who breaks open a jar of

perfume, in love and worship towards the one who has treated her as human, and forgiven. Put others first, he says - and it can be so hard to do. We can even institutionalise Jesus' words in a way that turns his meaning on its head. Have you noticed that in church processions the most important person always goes at the back? There's a strict hierarchy, and woe betide anyone who says, "After you," as you leave the vestry! Children in church, though, bring us down, literally, to their level, as all signs of hierarchy are broken down.

As I've been reflecting on all this, on the different examples of leadership, I've been thinking about how leaders are often either prophets or priests - prophets lead protests, they call the community forward, but in the end will not hold it together except perhaps for a time in obedience to their singular and often uncompromising vision, which is never far from being abusive. Priests call a community together, and help it relate to one another, and to God. They may be a bit over stable, a bit unadventurous - they are not necessarily the explorers of new ground. The Christian community, just as civil society needs both, prophets and priests - just as we follow a prophet and a priest - and needs to be both prophet and priest in the world, but in all things ultimately to serve God, for the sake of the world ... and especially the children.

*Now to the one who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. Eph 3. 20,21*