

## WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

### for *Come to Church Sunday*

*John 10: 7-16*

*From the sermon on 22 November 2015*

*Rev David McLachlan*

*Langside Church*

I'd like to begin with a photo of me playing golf. Actually, I would put one up, but I can't because I don't have a photo of me playing golf. The main reason for that is that I don't really play golf. I've played putting and crazy golf. I've even been seen a few times at pitch and putt. But I've only played three rounds of golf – ever. None of those courses were more than nine holes. The last time I played, I was out with my Dad and we packed it in on the first hole for reasons that I can't explain now.

Now you can try to draw a conclusion from this information. Clearly I don't like golf. I'm against golf. I don't think much of people who are golfers. I've decided not to play golf ever again.

None of that is true, though it may be that I will never play another round.

Here's the thing: when I drive along and see a golf club (or two if I'm on the Barrhead Road), I just sort of blank it out. It's just not what I do. I've got nothing against golf clubs or golf but it seems not to involve me. I don't spend any time thinking, *I wonder if I should go in and find out about joining?* The only time I find myself in a golf clubhouse is if there's a party on and the band I am in is playing there, or if I've gone back to the tea being served after a funeral.

My relationship to golf clubs mirrors some people's attitude to churches. People might go to a church for a special occasion like a wedding or for a sad occasion like a funeral, but when they drive past a church building they don't say, *I really **must** go to that place!* It's not that they've got anything especially against the church; it's just that they don't think it's got anything to do with their life.

One reason that people get up on Sundays and head for church is that going is part of their routine. It's not the most important reason to go to church, but it **is** one reason why they do. By the same token, one reason that people don't get up to head for church is that it's simply **not** part of what they do.

### **Nothing against it – it's just not my thing**

That, I think, is a common reason why people give church a wide berth. It's not that they have anything against it; it's just that it doesn't seem relevant. But for other people there may be a more serious objection.

## **I can't believe this stuff**

I decided to be a follower of Jesus when I was 13 – a long time ago! And here I am – a minister in a church. Well it might look like not much has happened then. I'm just the same... I've obviously not changed at all...

Yet that would be far from the truth. I'm very much different from that 13-year old. Obviously the passage of time has changed me, life has changed me, experience has changed me, but my beliefs have changed, too.

Yes, I am still a follower of Jesus but as I have grown and reflected on faith, my understanding has changed radically. Looking back, some of the things I was taught in church and by church groups and by (on the whole) well-meaning Christian people were just awful.

Here's just a couple of examples...

- I was told that the Bible was written by God; so it's perfect in everything it says.
- I was told that the world was made in six days and so Darwin must be wrong.
- I was told that the first woman on earth met a talking snake.
- I was told that God deliberately sent a flood to wipe out the creatures of earth except one family who brought animals onto an ark two by two.
- I was told that Jesus had to die a horrible death *before* God would forgive me.
- I was told that if God wanted to, God could just stop bad things happening.
- I was told that women were inferior to men.
- I was told that homosexual people are an abomination in God's eyes.

I don't believe any of that today. I continue to believe in and worship God. I continue to read the Bible and I consider it vitally important for my faith. I continue to learn from Jesus. But I don't accept everything I was told growing up in church.

And that's true for lots of people.

The trouble is that there are churches who continue to promote ideas about God that are not helpful, ideas that are offensive, and not worthy of God. Now, churches are all different. They can be as different as night and day. No one church gets everything right. We all have our strengths and weaknesses and Langside is no exception.

So, seeing we are here in Langside, what are we about? Here's some things about our church:

**We won't try to frighten you!**

We got rid of the guy in this picture a long time ago. We won't try to scare you.

We won't ignore you – do tell me if that ever happens – and we won't try to swamp you either. We try to be welcoming in the best sense.

**You don't need to check your brain in at the door.**

More about this later. Suffice to say, for example, that it's possible to take the Bible seriously without always taking it literally.

**We have nailed our colours to the mast – we welcome all.**

You would probably know from the media that the Church around the world is struggling with the issue of how we treat homosexual people. Some say the Church's view has been clear down through the centuries and there is no need to change it now. Others say they believe that God is guiding us into a new, more compassionate understanding (as God has done in the past concerning other groups of people).

I dare say there are folk in every congregation with different opinions on this one.

But we decided to take a public stand on this, partly because there were other congregations who were going public with their very different line. We agreed that we would be a church that welcomed people whatever their sexuality; we agreed that Langside would be a church where all are welcome. We do not accept that homosexual people are ill or defective and we certainly do **not** believe that they are an abomination to God!

Being an inclusive church doesn't mean that we only welcome people who are gay. It means that we welcome all people whoever they are – even people from Edinburgh or Greenock! And of course that means you too – everyone who is here today. Whatever your back story – whoever you are – you are welcome here.

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Now here are some things that we believe:

**We believe in action as well as words.**

We believe in helping our community and the wider world. We have our own Justice and Peace Group. We have contacts in Malawi, we're an Eco congregation, we're concerned about Welfare Reform, we support Foodbanks, we are going to the Climate Change march next week.

And we have our very own project – Finn's Place supported primarily by ourselves and the national Church of Scotland. It's a wellbeing centre which reaches out with a large and varied programme of activities, events, reflections and support; it involves people in our church, folk from our local community and beyond.

### **We believe in having fun.**

Film nights, quiz nights, parties, pyjama services, barbeques. Our Hogmanay Ceilidh is coming up fast. We do things together and we support each other. We care for each other in good times and bad.

### **We believe we are on a journey of learning.**

We're on a journey of faith and discovery together— and there is plenty for us to learn. In the spring we will continue with our Small Fellowship Groups, which bring people together in local homes to think and discuss together. At Finn's Place, we explore disciplines from around the world that are able to enhance our wellbeing and help us live well. We are also keen to engage with the questions we have about God, about faith, about life, about what it means to be Church in these times. We never shy away from these things.

### **We believe that the Gospel is good news.**

Today's reading came from John 10, where Jesus tells people what he is about:

*I have come that you might have life in all its fullness. (John 10: 10)*

Life in all its fullness. Life at its best. We believe that the Gospel is good news. Living Jesus' way doesn't lead us to riches. It probably won't lead to fame. Following Jesus does not mean life will be at its simplest or easiest or that we are magically immune from the kind of troubles that others may face.

But Jesus tells us this: being a follower of him will lead to life at its best – at its most worthwhile. Being a follower of Jesus inspires us to play our part in a better, kinder, fairer world. To be in tune with God is to make the most of our lives. It allows us to become the best version of ourselves.

So there's a few things about Langside Church:

- We believe the Gospel in Actions as well as words.
- We believe in having fun.
- We believe we are on a journey of learning.
- We believe the Gospel is good news.

We hope and pray that at our church we are up for surprises, that we are ready to try new things, that we are up for seeing things in a new light and hearing what God might want to say to us today.

Following Jesus is an adventure that we are on and we invite everyone here today to join in and be a part of that adventure.

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