

18th January 2020

Colours

“The colours of my life are bountiful and bold.”

Cy Coleman, Barnum

When I was a parish minister, I regularly had students on placement with me as part of their training for ministry. Every one of them was different, but I only ever had one who took his clothes off in church.

It was the student's turn to offer at Sunday worship what we know in the Church of Scotland as "The children's address", a way of engaging with youngsters before they go out for their Sunday School classes. During the hymn before the talk, I was astonished to see the young man, behind the curtain at the back of the pulpit, start to strip off. Jacket, tie, shirt, trousers, shoes ... I couldn't believe my eyes. There he was, down to his vest and pants, and we were on the final verse of the hymn! Just in time, when the final notes were dying away and people were sitting down, he deftly unearthed from a sports-bag a muddy shirt, shorts, socks and boots. And by the time he stepped out to greet the children, he was fully dressed. There were gasps of disbelief (though not as many as there might have been if he hadn't got the changing act finished on time). But he certainly had everyone's attention. His complete children's address was as follows:

Yesterday, I played rugby for my college. I haven't had time to wash my strip yet. We lost! But we enjoyed it, nonetheless. Everyone wore a top like this. These are our team colours. [Pause] We all need to wear the colours of being a Christian, so that people know we play for Jesus' team. [Pause] Now, let's sing a hymn together before you go off to your Sunday School.

We sang. He changed back into his suit and tie. The children left. The service proceeded. And, nearly fifty years later, I can remember the occasion as if it was yesterday.

And the point? Well, he *made* his point – though in a somewhat unconventional way. Whether the children remembered it, I have no idea. But I certainly did! What are the colours we wear that make Christians distinctive? Who are in our team? And how well do we play the game? Maybe I'll not bother to take my clothes off to illustrate ...

A prayer for today

Loving God, today I'll try to be dressed in your colours. Amen

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