

15th March 2021

Okay

“Love bade me welcome.”

George Herbert, Love: Love bade me welcome (1633)

Not long after I qualified as a minister, my granny told me the following story. She'd been staying with her niece for the weekend, and they went to church on the Sunday. It happened to be a Communion Service, a grand, set-piece occasion in the Church of Scotland, happening, in those days, four times a year at most. Church members were “invited” to Communion by means of a “Communion Card” which was handed to the elder at the church door. My granny, being a visitor, had no such card. The elder who greeted her announced, “I'm sorry. If you're not a member here, you'll have to sit upstairs. It's only members who can come in this way.” My granny pulled herself up to her full four-foot-ten and forcibly replied, “Ma grandson's a minister. An' he'll no' be happy when ah tell him this ...” and she was duly admitted into the “body of the kirk” to sit with her niece.

Two weeks later I was on Iona with a group of city teenagers from some deprived areas of the country for a week in the “Youth Camp”. Over seven days we shared a variety of activities. There was worship morning and evening in the Abbey church. The young people themselves prepared and delivered an act of worship. They all participated fully in a Communion service. At the end of the week, we were chatting together about their highlights. One young lad offered this. “See yon church, ken? Ah didnae think ah wid be allowed in wearin' ma san'shoes. Me an' ma san'shoes, eh? An' naeb'dy said 'ye cannae come in here.'”

What church would you rather attend? Is it the one where you're made to feel excluded because you're a stranger or you don't have a “ticket”? Or is it the one where “san'shoes” (that's sandshoes, or sneakers/trainers, if you like) are no barrier to attending worship?

Note to self: Suggest a banner outside the church which reads:

Love bids you welcome here. Sandshoes are Okay

A prayer for today

Living God, your 'love bade me welcome', and I'm grateful for that.

*So I pray that my love and actions
might make other people feel welcome too. Amen*

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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