

19th April 2022

Impressed

“Sir [their] preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.”

Samuel Johnson, The Life of Samuel Johnson Vol 1 (altered)

Maybe Samuel Johnson won't forgive me for removing a gender-specific reference from the quotation above. But the truth is, he wasn't impressed with the preaching he was hearing. I once met someone who felt the same!

As a probationer minister, I preached a sermon I thought was the best ever, only to be told by a member of the congregation that it was “rubbish”. Helpfully, though, she proceeded to make suggestions that would have improved it greatly! *And* she was quite right ...

Apart from preaching, what impresses us about people? Physical attributes? Success? Public accolades? Wealth? Status? And what do we consider to be unimpressive? Looks? Abilities? Achievements? Behaviour? A friend recently had an X-Ray on a suspected fracture of her foot which was causing a lot of pain. The Doctor looked at the X-Ray, pointed out a very small hairline break and said, “I'm not impressed with your fracture.” What *would* have impressed him? A leg hanging off, multiple breaks, a complicated procedure for orthopaedic surgeons? And yet was it not this “unimpressive fracture” that was the cause of so much distress?

Being impressed shouldn't be about quantifying what we see in a person against what we've found in others, or utilising whatever measurement society – or even medicine – might offer. But equally, being unimpressed should never be defined by the apparent insignificance of an issue in someone's life. That which is unimpressive to me, might be the whole world to you, something small that affects everything.

Jesus told a story about a lady who'd lost a coin and turned the house upside down till she found it. *We* might suggest the coin wasn't worth it. But an unimpressive or insignificant coin could have been that lady's whole world. And the lost sheep, when there were ninety-nine left? Was finding it not worth it too? And the lost son? If someone has a need, there's nothing to be impressed or unimpressed by in that. Measurements and judgments are an irrelevance when distress takes over a person's life. Wouldn't it be singularly unimpressive if we forgot *that* truth?

A prayer for today

Loving God, impress on me the awareness that the needs of others really matter. Amen