

Christ claims you for his own.  
Receive the sign of the cross.

Words spoken as I make the sign of the cross on the brow of a child in Baptism.  
Words spoken after parents and god parents have made promises on behalf of a child.

Words that speak of identity, of who we belong to. Who am I? Last week we were thinking of truth; what is truth, how do we discern truth, how do we distinguish between truth, half truth, innuendo, deceit? This week I want to think a bit about identity.

Coming up to Christmas, houses will be seeing new arrivals in the form a puppy or a rescue dog. There will be big ones, little ones, some pure bred, some of more dubious parentage. But each dog now has, or should have, a microchip inserted under the skin. If the dog gets lost, is involved in an accident, is stolen, the information encoded on the chip gives the identity of the dog, and to whom it belongs.

A mark of identity.

The cross made on the forehead at baptism – a mark of identity, who I am and to whom I belong.

I often find myself going back to the thoughts of a man who was Archbishop Canterbury when I was in my late teens and early twenties, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, when I was starting out on my own journey of faith. I had been baptised as a child but had not had any real interest in faith until my late teens. I was struck by the integrity of this man, the stand he took on racial discrimination in the face of people like Enoch Powell; on justice in the face of injustice in Rhodesia, in South Africa, in Chile. Stands that were not universally popular at the time. His role in the growth of the Ecumenical movement.

As I went further, was confirmed, went off to college, started exploring, I came across his thoughts on Baptism, the significance of Baptism, the challenge of Baptism. He came to see, he wrote, the whole of his life as lived in response to his Baptism. The promises of Baptism, he suggested, were a measuring rod for life. Periodically he used to ask himself afresh the promises of Baptism.

Do you reject the devil and all proud rebellion against God?  
Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?  
Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?  
Do you submit to Christ as Lord?  
Do you come to Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life?

These are questions of identity, who we are and who we belong to?

Our news media at the minute are awash with elections – bye elections here at home, General Election in the UK, forth coming Presidential election in the United States. Who do we want to represent us, what values are we looking for in our leaders? That actually says a lot about how we see ourselves and our society. There are candidates who are playing to people's fears about the other, the different.

People in Jesus' time were looking for a king, a Messiah. But what sort of King, what sort of Messiah? Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom of God, but a very different Kingdom to that expected or sought. He came to his own town of Nazareth. When invited to read in the synagogue, he read from the Prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” *Luke 4:16ff*

And declared, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” And some of those present found it hard to take. And so began a journey of teaching and healing, of

reaching out to the sinner, to the leper, to the despised that was to culminate in the Cross.

This is who we are and this is who we are called to serve. But we are not just members of a party, not just members of an organisation. We are more than that – much more than that.

We are individually and collectively members of the Body of Christ, called not just to proclaim Christ but to embody Christ in the world of today. That is what we have to offer to one another and to our society – to be Christ for one another, for those who are hurting, confused, disillusioned – to lift Christ out of our stained glass, out of our prayer books, our books of theology, and yes our Bibles and be nothing less than the lips, the hands, the feet of Christ in this troubling and confusing world.

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

I say to each child in baptism:  
Christ claims you for his own.  
Receive the sign of the cross.

And then I continue

Live as a disciple of Christ,  
fight the good fight,  
finish the race, keep the faith.