

WYSIWYG

Matt 11:2-11
Isaiah 35:1-10

It will come as no great surprise to many people that I love words. If I'm not already in your mental category of "people who use 20 words when one will do" then I should be!

And as I particularly enjoy unusual words, you can maybe imagine my delight this week to find a whole newspaper article about just that. So – because it's good to share – here are a few that I particularly enjoyed

Hogmadog – the name given to the tiny snowball that you make, and then roll round and round the snow to make a snowman. Who would even think of giving it a name – let alone such a delicious one as that!

Here's another – flapdoodler. 19th century slang for a "dissembling political speaker." Someone who "makes believe, with the intention to deceive." Hmm....

And one you might actually want to use – Yule Hole. A Scottish term meaning, "the hole in the waist-belt to which the buckle is adjusted after over-indulging in Christmas feasting."

But reading all these lovely words reminded me of an old favourite of mine

WYSIWYG

What You See Is What You Get

Which is the point at which this sermon turns from a romp through dictionaries and dialect, and back to this morning's gospel, and to this odd meeting between Jesus, and the followers of his, now imprisoned, cousin John, aka the Baptist.

Until he fell foul of the authorities for speaking the truth, John had been out there in the desert, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah – the long-awaited rescuer of Israel – in the person of Jesus. And yet the reports that have been coming to him in his cell are not those he is expecting to hear. He's expecting a Messiah who will stir up religious sentiment and use it to overthrow the occupying Romans. And Jesus isn't doing that at all. So John sends his followers to check.

"Was I wrong all along? Are you not really the Messiah?"

And Jesus says to the followers what is in effect the 1st century equivalent of WYSIWYG. What you see is what you get.

"Look at what I'm doing – giving sight to the blind, opening the ears of the deaf, making broken bodies whole again, and bringing good news to the poor....

"And then look at what the Scriptures say about the Messiah

“Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come....
he will come to save you.”

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.

“You *are* right – I *am* the Messiah. Not quite as you imagined me, perhaps. But yes, I am the one sent by God to rescue his people”

I guess we might say – “What You See Is What You Get.”

And then, when John’s followers have gone, Jesus turns to the crowds. And kind of turns the questions from John’s followers back towards John himself.

“When you went out to listen to him in the desert and maybe to repent of your sins so you would be ready for the Messiah, what did **you** expect? A quiet unassuming guy? A rich and magnificent leader?

“No – of course not. Look back at your Scriptures – are the prophets like that?

“No. They are loud and opinionated. It gets them into trouble. Lots of them got killed for refusing to shut up about what God was saying to his people.

“What You See Is What You Get.”

“John is definitely the prophet that God spoke of. The one who would announce the coming Messiah.

And that Messiah is me.”

So - “What You See Is What You Get.”

What does that have to say to us, here today?

If we’re really absolutely totally honest with ourselves, when people see us, do they see exactly who we are? Or some sort of public face, our socially acceptable image, our official persona, our “I’m fine, really I’m fine” face, or any other way of describing the mask behind which we all shelter in order to manage how other people see us.

Interestingly, social media has finally caught up with the idea that much of what is presented there is the curated, photoshopped image, and come up with a word to describe this ‘real’ face. And what’s more, it’s become this year’s Oxford English Dictionary “word of the year”

Goblin-mode.

Not a very flattering term, I'm sure you will agree. My first reaction is yeuch!

But my second reaction – well, maybe it is that sometimes we do see ourselves as a bit of a goblin. Because we know our own faults and failings. The bits of ourselves that we're not particularly proud of. And the aspects of ourselves that we maybe think others will find unacceptable.

Goblin mode (unattractive though it sounds) is the WYSIWYG time – the “what you see is what you get” time - where we are rejecting the managed image, and allowing ourselves to be seen as we really are.

And if this idea of coming out from behind our protective shield makes you feel a bit “ouch” – can I say that you are not alone. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that I suspect we are all feeling a little “ouch-y” right now. And almost certainly rather uncomfortable.

But actually, it's really important

Because allowing ourselves to be truly seen, 'warts and all', is the first step towards moving away from the idea that somehow we're just not good enough. Of leaving behind the fear that “if you only knew what I was really like.....then you wouldn't want to know me.”

Because – and here's the thing – God already knows what we're really like – and he loves us anyway. Loves us exactly as we are. Because he sees past all that 'stuff' and sees us like this – his beloved child.

So let's just stop for a moment and absorb that.

All those things about ourselves that we feel bad about – God knows those things, and loves us anyway.

All those failures that we don't seem able to resolve. God knows about them, and loves us anyway.

All those times we feel like we've let him, or someone else, down. God knows about them, and loves us anyway.

All those experiences in our past that have left us scarred and broken and maybe ashamed. God knows about them, and loves us anyway. And wants to make us whole again.

He loves us exactly as we are – and too much to leave us that way.

So he has done all that is needed to deal with all those things. And through his Spirit, he is on our side as we deal with them too.

And how much easier that will be when we stop trying to hide them from ourselves and others, and open them up to God's mercy.

And this is a hard thing to grasp. How does it become real? For us as followers of Jesus, and maybe even more so for those who have not yet met the God Who Loves.

And I wonder if the answer is that we all need to see this unconditional, transforming love **in action**.

And if so, how might this happen? How does it become real?

And again I wonder if the answer is - **through us**.

The people of God,

As we live Jesus' way,

As we walk Jesus' way

As we work on loving as he loves – unconditionally, and irrespective of age, colour, gender, sexuality, history, language, or any of the other barriers that we humans are so good at erecting between ourselves.

It becomes real as we respond to a love which takes root in our hearts and changes them.

Or at least, as we do our best to do all these things.

As we try to live more Christ-like lives, whilst acknowledging that we will not get it right all the time. As we are open and honest with ourselves, with God, and with each other where we don't get it right.

As we recognise that trying and failing doesn't make us a hypocrite, it makes us a learner. "On the journey" as we so often say. "We are all works in progress."

About the time I first heard the WYSIWYG word, I heard a sermon which has deeply influenced me ever since. It was about how we can choose to be as a church community.

The first was what was described as a 'community of performance'

In this way of being church, everything seems perfect. The leaders are viewed as infallible, everyone is respectable, worship is a polished performance, failure is seen as devastating, actions are driven by "I should", people are secretly hurting, people who are struggling with life run a mile, newcomers feel that they have to meet a set of standards before they can belong.

The second was described as a 'community of grace or acceptance'

In this way of being church, things are open, (you might say it's a WYSIWYG church) and therefore it's a bit messy. The leaders aren't perfect, worship is just one part of the life of the community, failure happens - but when it does, it is redeemed and used as an agent of growth. People can see and experience God's love and mercy in action, people who don't know if they believe in God feel like they can belong, people share their joys and sorrows, successes and failures, actions are driven by joy.

In a time when the latest census shows that less than half the population now identifies as Christian, I wonder which sounds more likely to reverse that trend?

I wonder which we aspire to be?

I wonder which Jesus is calling us to be?

And I pray that one day we will need the church equivalent of a Yule Hole – maybe not an additional hole in the belt due to over consumption of Christmas dinner, though. Maybe more space to accommodate all those who want to come to meet the God Who Loves.