

12th October 2021

Within

**“But I have within what passeth show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.”**

William Shakespeare, Hamlet

When Hamlet’s mother asks him why he still seems so upset about his father’s death, he tells her that he doesn’t just “seem” to be in mourning, he has feelings within himself that are far greater than what people see. Hamlet always has more going on than outsiders can see or understand. Throughout the play, he and king Claudius go to great lengths to hide the truth of their actions and intentions, and so do many other characters.

We do this all the time. What people see and assume is never the complete picture. There’s always more going on inside a person than people ever know. It happens, for example, in bereavement, when we’re expected to return quickly to functioning “as normal”, and we give signals that this is so. People ask us how are, and we say, “I’m fine”, though that’s not how we really are. But are people interested in what’s on the inside? Do they give us the time and space to try to understand what’s going on?

It can happen the other way round too, when we make assumptions about people’s “character” and fail to see, understand, or even be interested in, what they’re really like. We stop at what’s presented to us – the outside of their “house”, to use yesterday’s metaphor, when there’s really a lot more going on inside those exterior walls.

The culmination of the Zacchaeus story from yesterday, was that this Roman-paid tax collector became a changed man. St Luke tells us he “gave half of what he possessed to the poor” after his encounter with Jesus. Here was altruism, when many would still see evil. Here was good being recognised, developed and enhanced, when many would still be stuck with the tarnished, old, well-documented image.

Let’s go beyond the “trappings and the suits of woe”, whatever we think they tells us. Let’s reach to what’s “within that passeth show”, the pain and sorrow that still needs to be recognised, the possibility of change that even yet needs to be explored, the uniqueness of every individual that yearns for acceptance and understanding.

A prayer for today

Lord, when you see what’s within me, will you love me for who I really am?