



Pastor's Page

A Means of Identity

We were on our way home from Tywyn in Mid-Wales when we stopped off at Telford for a comfort break. Knowing we only had 20 minutes at this picturesque service station I carefully watched the clock. As time moved on I gently shepherded most of our 46 guests back towards the coach before leaping on myself. As I looked up I was surprised to see that we'd changed drivers. "Alright mate?" said the "new" not-so-friendly-looking driver. "Er, Yeh" said I trying to take in the confusing scenario. "I think you're on the wrong bus, he said "you're not Spanish are you?" (Evidently this vehicle was transporting a group of Spanish school children around the UK!) We both laughed (as you do!) then he said "I thought I didn't recognise your badge" (I had a badge on that some of the children on our trip had made for me) As I limped off to the right coach I mulled over the thought that it wasn't my face, my accent or the fact that I'm not a Spanish schoolchild that identified me as being on the wrong coach but the badge that I wore!

In a sense we all "wear badges" of identity right throughout life. In my primary school days I faced three crucial decisions regarding my identity; Was a Manchester United or Manchester City supporter? Was I a "Rolling Stones" or a "Beatles" fan? Was I a "Mod" or a "Rocker?" (Yes it was quite a Primary school!) The sobering truth is that over 40 years later two of these decisions continue to form part of my identity. (They don't call me the "Rocking Reverend" for nothing!)

As I went through my childhood and entered my teens I became increasingly aware of a much more important decision that I must face, namely, whether to follow Jesus or not. In January 1970 my sister and I were singing at a Children's meeting when the speaker referred to us as "Missionaries" as he attempted to illustrate to the youngsters what this word meant. For perhaps the first time in my young life I felt hypocritical. I knew I wasn't a committed Christian yet I was singing about Jesus. In a much less dramatic way I echoed the sentiments of John Wesley who on his return from Georgia, America, where he'd been working as a missionary said "I went to America to convert the Indians but oh, who will convert me?" (He was converted some years later) I didn't want to be a hypocrite I wanted to be a Christian. I knew that I had to make a decision that evening so following the meeting I spoke to my mother who helped me commit my life to Christ. I subsequently received an assurance that my sins had been forgiven and that I had a place in heaven. Jesus became my saviour and Lord and has stuck with me ever since.

That was 38 years ago and today I'm still doing my best to follow him. But as I've travelled on the Christian journey I've acquired lots of "spiritual badges" along the way. I was baptised as a child in an evangelical Methodist church, grew up in a keen Christian family, worked as an itinerant evangelist for 14 years, wrote Christian songs, was baptised as a believer, trained as a Baptist pastor, have a theology degree, am a Baptist Union accredited minister...but all of this means NOTHING if my heart isn't right with God!

Forget about wearing badges its 'knowing Jesus' that counts.

6th July 2008