

You do sometimes, without meaning to and despite your best efforts at hiding and diverting, masking and concealing, dissembling and distracting, give yourself away,

Your accent, your manners, your gauche attitude; where your eyes move to, how your hands move, how well you can bluff yourself through football talk at the barbers — not at all; that split second before you check yourself when you realise it's probably not the time and the place to break into a rendition of *I Will Survive*...

Try as you might to fit in, the real you will out. Despite your best efforts to learn Cathedral enunciation, add a sprinkle of stress to your day and out come the flat vowels. Take away the stress, and after forty odd years living in London, yes, you can manage to have a southern bath but no matter how hard you try can only ever share the suds with a West Riding rubber duck. I don't even know how you say it otherwise. My vocal equipment just will not compute. Every time you meet new people, they will ask you where you are from and 'London' won't do: nothing like what any person of colour has to put up with in this country of course moving south from the north is a mere taster. Still, they eventually get used to you, and then you say 'ey up' in the pulpit. Try as you might to fit in, the real you will out.

There was a little flutter-trend on Twitter recently: possibly not on your feed, but definitely on mine: it was photos of Tweeters who are gay, but when they were children, juxtaposed with the text 'my parents were surprised when I came out gay'. The photos needless to say are of the posters looking incredibly camp, impersonating Madonna, practicing their pout, looking bemused at a rugby ball, imitating a tea pot, and other such normal boyhood occupations. I have those photos. And to be fair, I was regularly called the F word before I had any idea what one was and way before I realised I was. You give yourself away. Especially when you're trying very, very hard not to.

Try as you might to fit in, the real you will out.

However upfront and in your face you fancy you are, even if we're not carrying a secret we don't want others to find out, we all sometimes put on a front; we all act the part, try to pretend otherwise, push it to the back of our mind, get out the best china when the Rector calls and stick out our little finger when we're making polite conversation and sipping the disgusting weak tea; cover the lines with foundation, turn prematurely orange, try not to cry and say 'yes I'm fine'; and most of the time the facade doesn't crack.

But, just now and then, try as you might to fit in, the real you will out. You will give yourself away.

That is not always a bad thing. I mean, we all know we're all putting on an act most of the time— if you didn't, well, welcome to the world of theatre. We all know we're all putting on an act, and lots of the time it's probably best to keep treading the boards and not, I don't know. behave in church as though you were at home in your jim-jams on the sofa binge watching watching *The Traitors*; best to stay in part and not speak everything that's going through your mind at any particular moment, not that is if you want to keep you friends and avoid spending most of your life in the waiting area at A&E. But we're not only hiding the bad stuff, the stuff that isn't bad but other people think is, the less polished stuff, the farmyard stuff. We're hiding the good stuff too. And sometimes it is a really, really good thing to give yourself away, for the world to know, just for a moment, what you are really like underneath all the layers of pretence.

Because.

You are made in the image of God. Yes you are. And sometimes, sometimes, not very often at all, but sometimes, definitely and without any room for doubt, that aspect of yourself is what you will give away.

Made in the image of God. Wow.

You give that away when you love. When you're kind. When you're able to forgive. When you can put someone else first.

And you do do those things, I know. The way our lives are lived, the way our world is organised, it's not always very often. But you're giving your true self away when you do. You are made in the image of God. The image may be tarnished. The dirt of the years may be layered thick over it, the patina of cares and woes, disappointments and distress can make it difficult to see the original, you can write your name in the dust, but sometimes you get a glimpse through. And, wow. You, yes you, are made in the image of God.

God too, sometimes gives himself away. Only God can reveal God to us, and sometimes, he does.

All the way through the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, particularly in St Mark's gospel, Jesus is very concerned to reveal his true nature only to a select few and to hide it from everybody else. Here are some samples: [we'll be hearing quite a few more as we work our way through Mark's account this year.]

*See that you say nothing to anyone*

Jesus says to the leper he has just healed

*Jesus sternly ordered them not to make him known*

directed at the demons he had just expelled from the possessed

*"You are the Messiah."*

Peter declared:

*And Jesus sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone about him*

Even with that declaration, even with that grasping of the truth that he glimpsed if didn't really understand Peter, he hadn't truly seen the reality, couldn't really know what big words he was saying, couldn't really know what lay behind and within the person he had just called God's anointed.

And then once, just once before the empty tomb, the hidden side came spilling out. Tromping around the towns and villages of Galilee, watching the healing, hearing the teaching, experiencing the compassion, the disciples had seen the full humanity of Jesus. Now, on the mountain, with Peter, James and John, Jesus was revealed in his full divinity; transfigured; fully man—that they already knew— and revealed, now, as fully God.

The blazing light faded of course. There's only so much the human mind can hold and only for a short time. The moments are few; the moments when we see God's revealing of himself are few. How could it be otherwise? It has to be glimpses, quick flashes, hints, a sense of something more. We cannot yet let ourselves be lost in the vision of glory.

Because there is still work to do; still the world is around us; still there are ears that have not heard the good news, still there are those who need healing, still those who suffer from the greed of others, still those who are afraid, still those who can only see themselves through the eyes of others and have never realised they are made in the image of God.

Lent begins on Wednesday. As we mark the start of the season of penitence and preparation, we will bear the mark of ashes on our foreheads; we will be solemnly reminded that we are dust, and to dust we will return.

Today Jesus is transfigured, his clothes

*'dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them'*

A truth is revealed.

Just as true, though, is when Jesus clothing is not dazzling white, when it is stained and blackened, grimy and blemished: because that is what happens when you are scrabbling in the dust, turning the house upside down hunting for the lost coin, scrambling through the hillside undergrowth desperately searching for the lost sheep, scouring the gutters looking for your sisters and brothers.

Yes, for all your pretences and performances, your acts and airs, you are dust and to dust you will return.

And.

You are precious beyond measure. God is searching for you and he will not rest till he has found you and brought you back to the fold. You are precious beyond measure. You are made in the image of God.