

Sermon

For St Andrew's CE Secondary School, Croydon

2 December 2011

I'm going to start by telling you something that normally shocks the pupils at my school when they first hear it:

I haven't owned a television since 1988.

I would like to pretend that's because I live a simple and frugal life and give all my money to charity.

Sadly that's not the case and although I don't have a television I would feel seriously under-equipped without my iPhone, iPad and even my Mac Book! I love gadgets. And I especially love my iPhone. I going to tell you about three of my favourite Apps today.

The first is really just a toy: I hope you can hear it over the mics in here: it will tell you something about me because it is, of course, a light saber app and I am a huge Star Wars fan. I was 12 when the first Star Wars movie was released and I saw it 5 times in the first two weeks it was open.

When people ask me why I became a priest I often say that it was the closest I could get to being a Jedi knight.

It's only partly a joke that I I say it. It is true that I became a priest because I believe there is good and evil in the world and that I want to work for what is good if I can. As Yoda puts it: "Where there no choosing is, the dark side for us chooses."

It's because good and evil are real that it's so important that we have our church schools, that our schools have priest chaplains and that the Eucharist is celebrated regularly in them.

Every single one of us face choices, choices that all be it in a small way are choices between good and evil.

People will often try and make it appear as if there are three choices in life; good evil and neutral; I don't believe that. We choose constantly either for the good or not.

One of the good things that your school is known for is its music and this afternoon's service demonstrates that. Along with star wars and science fiction generally I also love music; but I am not one of those people who can hear the first three bars of a song or piece of music and identify it. I am no good in pub quizzes.

That's why I love my second favourite app; Shazam.

Just in case there's anyone here who doesn't know what Shazam does it identifies music. I can hold my phone up to a piece of recorded music and it will search its database for the recording that is playing. It is remarkably accurate even when the phone is some way from the source. It amazes me that even different recordings of the same pieces of music can be identified. That quality of uniqueness, of difference is multiplied millions of times when we come to human beings; to our irises our DNA and even I would say to the way we love our lives. It is as if we are creating a piece of music by the choices we make, the interests and relationships we pursue.

So my third favourite app is my twitter app.

I love twitter and would love to have some followers from Croydon if you'd like to go to trinheadmaster, so far I think Mr Revie is my only St Andrew's follower. Already today I have tweeted a picture of one of the maths rooms at trinity; yesterday I tweeted pictures and comments on a drama lesson; this morning I have already tweeted my journey here and arrival. But I also tweet the other things I love; poetry, the church's liturgy, music, the countryside. I love finding twitter accounts in which you can get a glimpse of the unique melody of someone's life. When they are really good it's almost as if some kind of Shazam could identify a person from the range of their tweets; only this unique, individual human being is the collection of sounds, melodies and harmonies that make the music of their life.

Well, three apps; Lightsaber; Shazam and my twitter app.

But I want to end by showing something rather less modern. It's an icon, a holy picture painted in north Africa in probably the fourth century. Some pupils from St Andrew's travelled to the Taize community in France last summer with Mr Revie and they saw copies of this icon in the church there. It's often called the icon of friendship because Jesus is shown with his arm around his friend.

What it shows for me is something really important about human nature. It shows that we need Jesus. That however unique and wonderful we are we cannot stand alone.

There is something about being human that means when we make the choices of our lives we very easily slip into making choices that are not for the good but for evil. We are easily led by the crowd, carried away by emotion or take the easy option. When Luke Skywalker asks Yoda if the dark side is stronger, he says that it's not but that it is "Quicker, easier, more seductive."

We need to stand with Jesus, to tune our lives to his and to weave the melody of his life into ours.

And that's what the church is for, that's what we practice at church schools, we learn to recognise the beat that is the song that Jesus lives. We learn the resources, the prayers and the stories that will help us to stand with Jesus and not with darkness. We train to choose the good and not the dark side. Religion is there as a reminder not to follow just our own song but that of him who is our friend.

At Trinity the latest craze among some of our students is to wear what they are calling 'Jesus bracelets' or 'Jesus bands'. I don't know whether they have reached Croydon yet or if it's a Lewisham thing. We have a very strict rule about jewellery but we've made an exception for these. On each piece of the Jesus bracelet is a holy picture of Jesus, or Mary or one of the saints. We have allowed these bracelets because they are there as a reminder; a prompt when we are tempted to make wrong choices. They help us to remember Jesus whose single most important command was as we are doing here today to "do this in remembrance of me"

As Yoda said:

A great warrior is he, who wisely does not forget.