

What make Christians different?

Preacher

Jo Stoker

Bible Readings

Galatians 5:13-16

Matthew 5:13-16

Sermon

We Christians might be asked this question in two ways. Either as a challenge – “what’s so different about you lot, then? many people are just as good, if not better.... (and they don’t fight about their beliefs)”. Or the question can be asked out of genuine interest & fascination – “how come you’re different? ... you didn’t react just then like the rest of us would have done... you seem to have something special...”

Are Christians different?

Sometimes we want to say, “Yes, of course we are – or we should be!” But at other times we hesitate – “No,... we’re just normal, ordinary people, just like everyone else...(in brackets: “*not weird at all!*”)

As with all faiths, there are bad and good images of “Christians” out there in the world. The Bad Image says:

Christians can’t agree with each other; they can be bigoted, prejudiced and self-righteous; they can be boring, weird and prudish; they are always judging other people, and mostly disapproving of anything to do with sex...

The Good Image says:

Christians can be gentle, compassionate and courageous; they put themselves out for other people; they can be deeply spiritual and holy, and they have an amazing capacity to forgive even horrendous crimes or hurt against themselves...

What’s the truth?

What are Christians like? And what makes them like that???

What makes Christians different?

The truth is that we're flawed – and we know it. We're not perfect, and we're sometimes not even very nice, or kind, or good & holy. We want to grow and change – to live more meaningful, fulfilled lives. We know we need help. (And we find that help in Jesus Christ.)

The truth is that Christians *can be* very funny. We can laugh at ourselves and enjoy life! We don't run away from the joy – or the sorrow – of human experience, but we get immersed in sharing whatever life brings.

The truth is that Christians can be wise, compassionate, accepting, encouraging, generous & genuine, and honest with themselves & others. Actually bothered about people around them, they feel for those in need and do something about that.

(Are you feeling good? can you see yourself in these descriptions?)

But, lots of other people – faith or no faith – match up to those descriptions...

modest and realistic about themselves, full of life & fun, caring and compassionate.

What makes Christians different? The *answer* is in the question:

Christians ***are connected to*** (Jesus) Christ:

We follow him. We serve him. We worship him as Lord (Leader, if you like).

Our way of life is rooted in his way of life, and his way of death, too!

We are shameless copycats – but not clones.

Among Christians there is room for vast diversity and difference, but there is still the essential 'golden thread' which links us all to one another, and ties us all in to Jesus Christ. No Jesus Christ – No Christian!

No matter how good, kind or selfless you are, no matter how much someone can say "he led a Christian life", if there's no relationship with Christ, then we're not Christians and we're no different from all the other wonderful, generous, courageous, loving, people in the world. Christians are people who depend on the overwhelming love and graciousness of Jesus Christ that calls and welcomes us into relationship with him, and accepts our flaky humanity for all its faults.

OK, so that's what makes us different – (this massive, undeserved love we receive.)

What difference does this make to us?

What distinguishes us, and sets us apart as Christians?

What are the basic characteristics of “Christians”?

I want to suggest these three things:

Christians are: **Worshippers, Followers, and Servants**

WORSHIPPERS

God is our hero, our bottom line, the centre of our existence. We *worship* him. We cherish him, adore & wonder at him. God is what matters most to us. God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is the way, the route, for our lives to take,

the truth from which everything makes sense,
and the only way worth living.

Christians are Worshippers.

FOLLOWERS

Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. We stay close to him, and learn from him. And we want to invite other people to follow him too – to know him and the difference he makes. As followers we are not meant to be private and invisible, but to be an effective presence for good in our communities. Today’s Gospel reading spoke of the Christian community being like “light” and “salt” in the world. This means that our lives are to be signs that God is *about* in the world, bringing hope and healing, and enlivening all creation. And “followers” means “company” – it’s not a solitary pursuit. Christians need one another.

SERVANTS

We are servants of others for the sake of Christ. That is, we are people who know that what we do (or don’t do) for even the most insignificant person is done as if for Jesus himself. And because we love him, we want to love other people too – though goodness knows, we’re poor at it!

In our New Testament reading St Paul tells the Galatians to be servants. He says, “through love becomes slaves to one another” and “Love your neighbour as yourself”.

We are “slaves” by choice, not by force – willingly available for other people.

Servants of the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, outcasts, the sorrowful, damaged & trapped people.

We are Worshippers, Followers, Servants.

What makes us different is God’s love & forgiveness.

The difference this makes in us, and in the world, is up to us!