

Dear Friends,

The elusive quest for a Methodist identity: 5

The first day I arrived to take up a new appointment as a Minister (not here!) someone knocked on my door and said very earnestly: *I hear you are a born-again Christian*. Ah, I replied, that's very interesting. I believe I am, but I have a shrewd suspicion I am about to become rather a disappointment to you.

It's all too easy to pin a label on people. I have heard Methodists (whether churches or individuals) labelled in all kinds of ways over the years: traditional, catholic, liberal, evangelical, happy-clappy, dyed in the wool, bland, progressive and redundant. That's before the colourful language kicks in. But most labels tend to diminish people rather than build them up. At best, they pigeon-hole and constrain them and, at worst, they demonize them. Methodists, at the end of the day, will prove to be a diverse lot of Christians, with different styles, emphases, and aspects of mission; and they will always be far more than any of the labels that get stuck on them.

Is there, though, a label that could be applied across the board? Well strangely enough, yes there is – and that is the term *evangelistic* (not to be confused with *evangelical*). However different we might all be – and that can apply just as much within congregations as between them – Methodists are an evangelistic people. We have a gospel to proclaim, to explore, to share, to live out. We might be evangelistic in different ways but we share the same message: Jesus is good news. It's a label that declares we are a movement with a mission rather than just another club.

Philip

From Hymns and Psalms (465)

*We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.*

A Prayer

Lord, I want to thank you for those who are evangelistic in the ways that I am not. And I want to ask for your grace, so that the good news I share will be felt as good news by those who hear and receive it. And, Lord, while we are on the subject, can you save me from the guilt of feeling I have never done enough one day and the self-righteousness that thinks I have cracked it the next? Amen