

Occasion: St Michael's Church, 15 Feb 09, 8am and 10am
Propers: Sexagesima, Second Before Lent B (Alt: Col 1.15-20, John 1.1-14)
Preacher: The Rev'd Darryl M Jordan

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Don't you hate it when complete strangers knock on your door trying to sell you their religion? Actually, I don't. I love it! I enjoy discussing ideas with people, even those who come to my home, unknown, uninvited and unannounced, presuming I want to talk with them about **anything**, let alone something personal like **religion**. But they're **asking** for it, and they certainly **get** it, with generous dollops of doctrine so essential to our Christian Faith, which we say in the Creed here at St Michael's!

So last Sunday after Church, just as my family were about to sit down to a delicious roast dinner Lisa had worked so hard to prepare, someone rang the bell. My first thought was, *Oh come on, not now! How would you like it if I came to **your** door unannounced at 1.00pm on a Sunday and interrupted lunch with **your** family?* Then I heard Lisa say the fateful words, "Can you wait for just a minute? I'll get my husband – he's a priest." My heart ran cold. I thought, *Gee thanks, Lisa! You and Catherine will just have to enjoy another meal without me.*

My indignation was misplaced. Far from being like needy people I sometimes encounter whom I haven't the means to give proper assistance, the man on the doorstep was polite and far better dressed than I. He was also from the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. Bless him; he'd come not to **receive** but to **give**: the Gospel according to Charles Taze Russell. Far from feeling annoyed, I was ecstatic!

But I now have to wonder how our evangelist felt when Lisa said her husband the priest was coming. Was he nervous? Was he thinking, *Uh oh. Those guys do theology courses on the Trinity, which we deny.* Or was it rather, *Great! Anglican clergy these days are dumbed down and desperate. All they care about any more is **doing** good and helping people **feel** better about themselves. They don't really **believe** in anything any more. And if they do, they certainly can't **defend** it.*

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So I greeted him at the door. I noticed he had his Watchtower translation of the Bible in hand. I brought nothing, though ordinarily I would be armed with a copy of the Nicene Creed. In years past, I asked JWs to show me their translation of John chapter 1 verse 1, which starts our Gospel reading for today. His translation would end, 'the Word was with God, and the Word was **a god**.' Then I'd try to convince him mine was better, which reads, and you can follow it on your readings sheet, 'the Word was with God, and the Word **was God**' His translation says the Word is just **a god**, which means not the same as God the Father, or Jehovah as his 'witnesses' call him. Charles Taze Russell, who founded that flavour of the Christian faith, taught his followers that our one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God, is not, as our Creed says, 'of one being with the Father'.

They don't even believe in using Creeds at all. For them the Bible alone is enough to establish all beliefs. And according to the Bible, Jesus was the first created being. In fact, he could back his view that the Son was the first created being using today's epistle reading in our translation, 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.' In fact, [their translation](#) of Colossians 1.15 reads **exactly** the same as ours. I checked. So taken by itself, that verse says Jesus was born. Like the Arians of the 300s who opposed inserting the words 'of one being with the Father' into the Creed because they're not in the Bible, the Jehovah's Witnesses say there was a time when the Son was not. In the very beginning there was no Son.

They have a good motive, of course. To say that Jesus is God can be taken to mean there are two Gods, and if you throw in the Holy Spirit, then there are three. The Arians in the fourth century and the Jehovah's Witnesses today are basically trying to protect monotheism, the view that there is only one God. Of course, we believe that as well: God is **one** substance and **three** persons, the Church's formula.

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One of my Anglican heroes is [Stewart Headlam](#), who live in the late 1800s. He tended to hold views which, though now taken for granted, made him very unpopular in his day. He was very Catholic for starters, and he also liked to get churches working together if they believed in the Trinity. [Sound familiar](#)? It got him falsely labelled a Universalist, the view that it doesn't matter what you believe, you'll still be saved in the end. In 1875, during Headlam's training curacy, his bishop asked his incumbent, 'Does Stewart believe in the Divinity of Our Lord?' The vicar replied, 'Of course he does, and I think he believes in the divinity of Our Lady also.'

I did not try to show last week's Sunday visitor any Bible verses supporting the Divinity of Our Lord. I never disputed the wording of his translation. In fact, I said we have virtually the same Bibles. But I did ask him how he knew his Bible contained all the right **books**. I explained that in 367, bishop Athanasius wrote a letter that contained the New Testament canon, the official list of 27 books all Christians have used ever since. His list became the official Church canon in 401 when the Pope gave his seal of approval. Then I explained that 42 years **before** Athanasius wrote his list, he convinced the Church to believe that Jesus is the same substance as the Father. It wasn't enough simply to say, let's just agree to disagree whether Jesus is **fully** divine. So the next question I asked the stranger was, why do trust Athanasius and his Catholic Church to tell you which books belong in your Bible, yet you don't trust Athanasius and his Catholic Creed to tell you Jesus is God? He had no answer.

Our chat ended cordially. I thanked him for coming, wishing him well as he helped people to believe in God. He showed me Matthew 7.12, 'All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them.' You'll be happy to know I didn't ask for his address so I could interrupt **his** Sunday lunch sometime.
+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.