Taking Sides?

It was about 5pm when I looked in my wallet to discover that my bank debit card was missing! Desperately trying not to panic, I quickly ran through in my mind when I might last have used it and realised this had been at lunchtime when I'd put petrol in the car. I had used the 'Pay at the Pump' service, and being otherwise distracted by choosing the correct fuel, I had driven away leaving my card in the machine, discovering this 'unfortunate error' almost 5 hours later.

You can imagine my relief, along with the self-discipline required not to hug the sales attendant, when she handed the card back to me. It had been safely stored in the office drawer and presumably retrieved by the next honest customer at the pump.

'There *are* good people in this world' was my joyful response. Not that I don't believe this, but personal experience endorsed the I faith have in (most of) my fellows. I am well aware that an unscrupulous finder could have enjoyed quite a spending spree in the intervening hours.

I think we are all well aware that the distinction between 'good people' and 'bad people', is pretty simplistic and in general not true to human nature. We are all a complex mixture of behaviours and motivations, arising from…. well, all sorts. Let's not go there now.!

Simple stories, the rhetoric of the media, stereotypes we learned as children, the lies we tell ourselves and others can reinforce the message though – that there are 'goodies' and 'baddies' in this world.

It must be said that we are well aware of horrendous acts carried out by some people, and there are atrocities that can only be described with by word *evil*. We don't avoid this issue – and we also know these are not the actions of the majority.

I wonder whether the Christian church has offered a confusing, unhelpful, message at times?

A very stark example was a song I learned in Sunday School about 60 years ago - thankfully one I haven't heard since – with these excruciating lines:

"*One door and only one and yet its sides are two; Inside and outside, on which side are you?*

One door and only one and yet its sides are two. I'm on the inside, on which side are you?"

This seems to be to be a self-righteous, exclusive message of insiders and outsiders. Not a message about God I recognise nor an image of the God I want to worship.

Christian teaching can also give a strong message of whether we are originally bad (sinners who need forgiving), or essentially blessed (yet damaged and hurt by life; people who need healing). The way we approach 'confession' speaks of this difference. Think of the language we use. The way we speak of 'salvation' makes a distinction. Jesus who suffered <u>for</u> us – because that is deemed necessary for sacrificial 'atonement'; Jesus who suffers <u>with</u> us – in sacred 'at-one-ment' with creation. The bible and theologians support differing views.

I believe this matters – on our own journey of faith – and equally in the message we share with others.

What Is the message which people relate to (which you relate to); which resonates in their / your lives, which draws them / you to a deeper sense of God?

Two weeks after my little drama at the pumps, and all had settled in my mind, a £20 payment disappeared from my bank account with no plausible explanation. The bank's fraud department swiftly dealt with this, and I am now once again 'cardless' as I await a replacement. Has there been a mini spending spree with 'Argos online' after all??

We'll never know all the answers, but we do have a choice about how we view ourselves, others, and the nature of God.

LMT