

In June 2012, Justin Mote came to preach as a guest speaker at Trinity Church Bradford. Adrian Watts took the opportunity to ask him a few questions.

Adrian: Justin, you have supported Trinity Church from the very beginning. You spoke here at the launch event, you have bought Tom and I lunch many times and mentored us this last year. And you came over from Leyland last Sunday to preach on the book of Joshua. Thank you for your support but I would like to ask you: what motivates you to support us so generously in this way?

Justin: Because the gospel is good news, God wants everyone to hear it, that includes Bradford and therefore when a new church starts in Bradford that is seeking to make Jesus known in this part of the world, I think every Christian ought to support it. It would be stupid not to because it is clearly what God is about.

Adrian: Have you always had that drive to support Christian work? And have you always been a Christian?

Justin: No, I was brought up in a non-Christian home, my father was an atheist, my mother was a sort of never-attending Anglican. I was christened/baptised when I was six months old - I can't remember anything about that at all - and I went to a cousin's wedding when I was eleven. Those were the only two occasions I had been in church growing up.

Adrian: So what happened?

Justin: In assembly, the head teacher said that the school were running confirmation classes and I mentioned that at tea time at home. My mother said, "Oh yes, get confirmed as a teenager, get that kind of thing out of the way", and "your godparents will probably buy you presents". That sounded like a good idea. The clincher for me was that if you signed up you could miss first lesson on a Tuesday which is when confirmation classes were, and first lesson on a Tuesday was physics, and any opportunity to miss physics seemed like a good thing, so I signed up with scandalous rapidity. At the first one I don't think I listened to a word that was being said; I did my French homework, and then at lunchtime that day the physics teacher said, "Do you think we ought to meet after school and go through the lesson you missed this morning?" It wasn't really a question and so I said yes. We met up after school, we went through the lesson and he said, "Can I ask you why you're planning to get confirmed?" And I said, "I don't know" - I couldn't say it was to try and miss his lesson. He said, "I think you should only get confirmed if you're a real Christian. Are you a real Christian?" I said "I don't know". He said, "Would you like me to explain to you what a real Christian is?" I said yes. And he explained to me about my rebellion against God and about Jesus' death in my place and the need to put Jesus as king of my life. I didn't listen to anything that went on in confirmation class but for ten weeks this physics teacher met with me after school on Tuesdays. Every week he asked me whether I was going to be a real Christian or not and I came up with every objection I could. He answered every one of them graciously and clearly and at the end of the ten weeks he said, "Have you got any questions left", I said no, he said, "So are you going to become a Christian", I said, "I don't really want to but I can't think of any reason why not to."

Adrian: Wow.

Justin: I was a reluctant convert; I didn't want to become a Christian but I was so persuaded with the truth of what I was reading in the New Testament that I just couldn't see any reason why I shouldn't be a Christian. Intellectual integrity demanded that I became a Christian - I had no emotional feeling or experience, it was just I could see that it was true.

Adrian: It feels today that in the public square, whether you're a doctor or in a hospital or in a school, or just in the workplace, that we're not allowed to talk about Jesus anymore, so it's remarkable to hear that this physics teacher was able to say, "Do you want to meet up after school and go through the lesson you missed". Have times changed?

Justin: Certainly times have changed, this was over 35 years ago, but all he was doing was asking an innocent question, "Why are you getting confirmed?" It was fair enough to ask, and he just followed where the conversation then led. I think I could have pulled the plug at any point, but I wanted to ask questions and he was happy to answer them. I think if discussions go that way we ought to take the opportunity. I don't think he was ramming it down my throat; I think that is probably objectionable in the workplace, but he was picking it up relationally. I think that is fine.

Adrian: Thanks for sharing that. Now you are part of the church family at St Andrews in Leyland which is just south of Preston. Can you tell us a bit about that church?

Justin: We are a Church of England church, established since 1294. Ever since the Reformation it has had an evangelical tradition. It has gone up and down at times through history but the vicars in anyone's living memory have been evangelicals. We're a church family of six congregations on a Sunday, meeting in four different locations.

Adrian: Hotels?

Justin: No, we've got one in a school, one in a community centre, and one in a church hall.

Adrian: I understand that you are the associate minister there and you are involved with the Northwest Ministry Training Course.

Justin: That is right.

Adrian: Can you tell us about that? And the new degree course that you are involved in.

Justin: I work for a network of about 65 cross-denominational evangelical churches in the northwest of England that have decided to work together to do things that we as individual churches wouldn't be able to do. One of those is a ministry training scheme. People after university take a year or two out, working in a church as an internal trainee or apprentice and I am responsible for the training that they get centrally. We do that in Liverpool on Tuesdays and in Leyland on Thursdays. This year we have had about 65 ministry trainees around the region. In the last couple of years we have wanted to develop a theological

training centre where we can offer a degree in theological and pastoral studies so that people in the northwest do not need to leave the region if they want to train to be a pastor, so doing the kind of thing that you did at Oak Hill. We think that that will see people stay in our region after training to be our pastors and church planters. I think we'll see - and we are already seeing - people raised up for ministry whose life opportunities and time would make it very difficult for them to up sticks and move to, say, London. We have got one guy who has started the degree who has three teenage kids and he just would never have had an ideal window to go and train but he has been able to stay living where he is, his kids can stay at the schools they are at and he is training to be a pastor in the region.

Adrian: That is really exciting. Finally, as you think about this whole region in the north of England, what is your vision and prayer for the next ten, twenty, thirty years?

Justin: The northwest of England's got a population of just around 7.2 million people; it's the second largest region in the country, second to the southeast. Evangelical churchgoing in the northwest is about 1.5 percent, which is fairly small. It's bigger than Yorkshire percentage-wise. Yorkshire in terms of evangelical church attendance is less evangelical than Japan - you are a more needy area than Japan, which is striking because you think of Japan as a mission. That's why I'm wanting to support you guys.

Adrian: And one of our students, Brad, his parents are missionaries in Japan.

Justin: We think of Japan as somewhere that needs the gospel and it does, but evangelical church attendance in Japan is higher than in Yorkshire. But even in the northwest, 1.6 per cent is tiny. Our prayer is that we might see 5 per cent of people in our region in evangelical churches. For that to happen we'd need 360,000 people going to church; if they were in large churches of a hundred we'd need 3600 churches in our region.

Adrian: You're going to need a lot of leaders.

Justin: We need a lot of people trained for ministry, don't we? It's a huge task, and we can't be self-congratulatory at all, we've seen about 25 new churches start in the past 8 years, that's a drop in the ocean compared to what needs to happen, and that would only be for 5 per cent!

Adrian: Thanks so much for sharing. We want to express out support for the work that you're involved in.

Justin: I appreciate that.

Adrian: We will be praying for you later, so do send our love and thanks back to the church at St Andrews

Justin: Thank you.