

## A message from Revd. Ben Thompson

### Be yourself!

If you've seen anything of the self-improvement industry, or have some experience or knowledge of talking therapies, you have doubtless heard about the importance of being yourself. Likewise, if you've come across 'influencer' culture, you've probably heard about the importance of being authentic, or at least heard people being criticised for not being authentic. It is the social creed of the twenty-first century.



I've made no secret of the fact that I was diagnosed with ADHD by a clinical psychologist 12 months ago. This condition, a recognised disability, means that I struggle to be myself without realising it. I've grown up learning to conform my behaviours, masking my conscious thought processes, to those around me and myself because I would otherwise spend my life being excessively rude and disruptive in most circumstances. It is only since receiving a diagnosis I've become alert to the person behind my various public and private faces, the "me" I've hidden from myself almost as much as from others in order to "fit" into every situation.

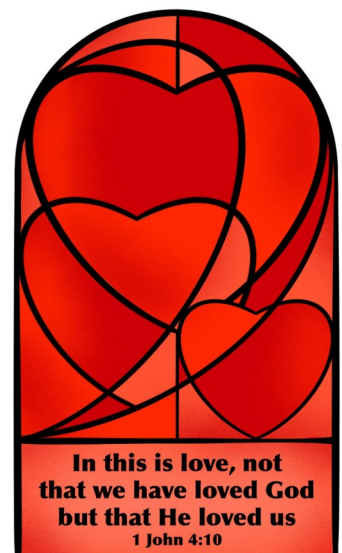


It's also no secret that the mainstream culture of being "authentic" is full of deception and falsehoods. Some are rejected for the crime of being inauthentic when trying to fit in, even though 'people pleasing' is a part of their personality. Others are so anxious to be liked that they mask their vulnerabilities in an attempt to acquire credibility, leading to endless "drama triangles" of victim-persecutor-saviour dynamics as they shift the focus from themselves onto others.

The 20<sup>th</sup>-century Trappist monk and mystic Thomas Merton wrote "For me to be a saint means to be myself." Merton explains that this is not to say that we should bow to our impulses. "I use up my life trying to accumulate pleasures and experiences and power and honour and knowledge and love, to clothe this false self... when they are gone there will be nothing left of me but my own nakedness and emptiness and hollowness."

You and I, Thomas Merton and all the reality TV stars, were made for the purpose and function of Love. Not infatuation which suppresses itself, or idolization which prevents us from sharing our love more widely, but with the honest and generous love modelled in the person of Jesus Christ. It's a love which allows us to accept others as they truly are, and even overcomes the challenge of accepting ourselves as we truly are.

If you really want to be authentic, really want to be yourself, start by looking beyond those walls you've built to protect yourself, especially those preventing you from accepting that you have been created by God who is love, for love, and that you are worthy of love regardless of anything and anyone else in this world. Your true self is loved and will love and receive love freely if you will take the risk of removing the masks.



**In this is love, not  
that we have loved God  
but that He loved us**  
1 John 4:10