

Thursday 2nd October 2025

As the putt rolled in, the emotions leapt out! It was like watching a giant leprechaun thundering around the 18th green, arms aloft, jumping up and down and with a smile as big as the River Liffey. This large guy with a larger-than-life personality was showing exactly what it meant, not just for him but for the team that he was so invested in. The notoriously difficult Bethpage Black Course would henceforth become known as 'Bethpage Blue'

Irishman Shane Lowry had just secured the vital point that would see Europe retain the Ryder Cup and, in so doing, create history by winning on American soil.

For sports fans, the weekend of 26th-28th September was an absolute smorgasbord of entertainment. Over in America, the bi-annual golf tournament was being staged in New York; here in the UK, the Women's World Rugby Cup Final was being held at Twickenham between England and Canada in front of a record 81,000 fans. Not to mention the usual football fixtures where most importantly Ipswich beat Portsmouth (2-1 in case you're wondering)!

'If Carlsberg did weekends' I thought to myself late on Sunday night after the winning point had been secured in the golf.

And yet, I found myself feeling somewhat troubled by aspects of the golf spectacle. This was in direct contrast to what I saw in the Rugby Final.

What do I mean? Well, in a word: Partisan.

Like many people, I'm increasingly concerned about the polarisation that's happening in all aspects of life on a global, national and local stage. Sadly, I see it at it's most prominent 'over the pond' where there's either right-wing or left-wing, conservative or liberal, pacifist or fascist to name but three.

Out of this has spawned those who believe that their opinion is the correct opinion and if you don't hold to that, well quite frankly you're weak.

With the golf that took place last week, in amongst brilliant play from both sides, there was a volley of hate directed at the European team (Rory McIlroy got dogs abuse) by a loud minority of American support. It's one thing to shout out 'U-S-A' to spur your team on, it's another thing to direct toxic and bile-filled chants at the opposition.

If it was uncomfortable to watch, goodness knows what it was like to play in. There seemed to be an attitude of 'if our team can't win, then we'll do what we darn well can to make yours lose'.

It was not a good look.

But over here, and away from sporting analogies, there's a creeping – more than a creeping – towards he who shouts the loudest wins!

It's there is the political auditoriums of cultured settings and outdoor rally's, where debate has been superseded by unholy shouting matches, and where carefully

scripted pieces to camera are designed to undermine, divide and conquer rather than understand, unite and strengthen.

The unhealthy obsession with our national flag, whether being painted on roundabouts or flown from lampposts, is not some awakened patriotism of who we are as a vibrant eclectic demographic and multi-ethnicity nation but rather a 'keep out, boot out, stay out' agenda driven by the far right to protect 'our country' and destroy the richness of who we have become by welcoming people regardless of creed, colour or culture.

The integrity of who we are as a nation is threatening to be eroded by a fear driven agenda- purporting to be truth - that's got wired into people through the misinformation highway of the internet.

The statement goes something like this: *The crest on my chest says I am the best and yours doesn't count so I couldn't care less.*

I find myself saddened, frustrated and angry.

But there is hope to be found should we look for it. The Women's Rugby World Cup Final featured two opponents, both wanting victory and both seeking to achieve it by being the better team. On one level, same as the golf. On another level, so very different.

The crowd made up of supporters from both Canada and England happily met up before the game, sat beside each other during it and walked away together at the end. Canadians sad but proud of their team and England elated and also proud of their team.

There was no crowd disturbance, rather an overwhelming sense that the game had been a brilliant advert for Women's Rugby...and, in a multi-layered way, it joyously was.

As I reflected on these contrasting scenes, I wondered:

if Jesus were a spectator at both events, how would He report on them?

It's a moot point I know, but as I visual learner, it helped me to consider what should be true of us when we know that the King of Kings is standing next to us in the crowds?

In the midst of all the flag waving that has been laced with anger and selfishness...

I don't see Jesus waving any flags.

He doesn't carry a red and white St George's flag, and he doesn't carry a rainbow flag either. To do so would be to say: 'some count and others don't'. In fact the closest you'll get in the bible is when Solomon writes of God: '*His banner over me is love*'.

Jesus predicting His death in John 12 says: *And I, as I am lifted up from the earth, will attract everyone to me and gather them around me*'.

In that place of pain and sacrifice where a partisan crowd gathered, Jesus' death was the point at which people were *drawn to Him* because of God's outrageous grace and amazing love. This is the point where no-one is excluded but that everyone who calls on Jesus' name can find Hope, Forgiveness, Light and Love, only in and through Him.

Jesus neither stands on the left or the right to argue and debate; He sits in the middle and wants to engage with the conservative and the liberal, the far right and the far left, the fascist and the pacifist. He reaches out to them (and everyone in between) and says: 'I love you and I want to be in relationship with you'.

This is radical in the very best sense of the word. This is a radical that smashes through partisan blockades with truth, God's truth told in the life death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus in sacrificial selflessness, not man-made truth based on sanctimonious selfishness.

I can consider the world we live in and despair, and at times I do. But on other occasions, I can recognise that God calls me to model Jesus in how I live my life and interact with people, not least those who I disagree with. Can I model good dialogue that's respectful and seeks to understand and notwithstanding, to be able to disagree agreeably but make a small difference for the sake of God's kingdom?

One thing I believe is that God calls us higher, not just in holiness but to be able to speak truth to power through the lens of His Grace, being counter cultural in our language and life by demonstrating the Beatitudes.

Those who stand on their beliefs using religion as their guise will cause division, hurt and hate.

If the world were to stand on the life of Jesus Christ, then some of their beliefs would be shattered and a Damascus-Rd-like recalibration will see scales falling from eyes and hearts being opened to God.

And what of unity? God delights in it. That's why it is a privilege and a joy to be co-facilitating Alpha with my friend Mitch; Anglican minister and more importantly brother in Christ. We put our different denominations to one side and keep the main thing the main thing, namely sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ to seekers.

After all, if we don't start, continue and finish with Jesus, then what's the point!

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favour: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

⁵⁻⁸ Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the

privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

*⁹⁻¹¹ Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honoured him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honour of God the Father.
Philippians 2:1-11*