

Presentation for Disability Conference

Well, hello everyone. It is an honour and a privilege to be able to talk to you today on this annual disability weekend. For those who don't know who I am, my name is Darius James Traves. I am a potential ordinand for the Church of England within the Diocese of York.

I have been asked to talk to you today, a little bit about Just As I Am. But, before I do that, let me tell you a little bit about my background. I was born in 1995 after a normal pregnancy but an accident during the birth left me 35 minutes without oxygen. This caused me to have Cerebral Palsy. For those who do not know what that is, it is basically a lack of oxygen to the brain at birth. It is a lot more complicated than that but if you want to know more, come and talk to me during the coffee break. The type of Cerebral Palsy that I have meant that I shouldn't be able to walk! Yes, I think that God was having a laugh at scientific thinking.

I grew up with my mother and my two siblings. At the age of four I found God even though I was in a family that had atheistic and agnostic beliefs. Since then I have known that I was called to Priesthood, which I am discerning today. Life hasn't always been easy or straightforward. At the age of eleven I suffered with anger and depression because I had begun to realise that I had a disability that effected me more than I had realised. This led me to have suicidal thoughts. Because of all these problems, I was placed into care as my family couldn't cope with me. By the grace of God I eventually moved in with my grandparents.

I went to a special needs school until I left at the age of 18. I still felt a calling to Priesthood. I received an unexpected email from a Church of England Director of Ordinands. He suggested that I raise awareness of my disability and my faith and also develop a chaplaincy role within Special Needs communities, After much discerning I felt that God was leading me to set up a project called Just As I Am.

So, what is Just As I Am for me and for us as a community? Like I have already mentioned Just As I Am is a ministry that God has given me. I work alongside a charity which deliver high quality RE based workshops within schools, Special Needs schools and

Churches. Again, if you want to know more about that you can ask me later during a break.

I want to talk you about what Just As I Am might mean for us.

We could look at it from a literal point of view. For example, the clothes that I wear define who I am. In that way, we should be accepted for who we are. But if we look at it from a theological point of view it could mean something different. We can look at the story about Moses and the burning bush. Moses said to God "Who do I say that you are?" God answered and said "I am who I am". With this in mind I wonder if it is saying something quite different than the Just As I Am wording. Needless to say I am not suggesting that you or I are God. Not in the slightest. But, are we? If you look at Book of Psalms, Psalm 139, it says this. "For you knit me together in my mother's womb. You are fearfully and wonderfully made". 'I am' means God. So if we look at the words Just As I Am again, in the light from what I have been talking about today, is it saying we are made just as God wanted us to be?

Thank you.

Darius Traves