

PM Panel – Bingo Allison

Good afternoon. My name is Bingo Allison. I am genderqueer and my pronouns are they/them. I work as a curate in the Church of England. And I am also autistic and dyspraxic. I have been involved in disability advocacy for more than ten years and, in a former life, was able to contribute to Inclusive Church's own disability resource book. I am passionate about fully including neurodivergent people in the life and faith of the Church, particularly in our telling and retelling of stories from the Bible. The history of biblical interpretation is littered with the opinions of rich, white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied, neurotypical men assuming that everyone in the passages that they read thought like them and perceived the world like them. The biases that this creates exclude anyone who doesn't fit from fully engaging with the Bible, and often lead the church to miss out on vital perspective on all sorts of biblical narratives.

So if Biblical scholars tended to be neurotypical and tended to assume that everyone they read about in the Bible was like them unless specifically informed otherwise, what would happen if I assumed the opposite? What if a neurodivergent hermeneutic started with the assumption that, unless specifically informed otherwise, certain characters were neurodivergent?

Thinking I would start with someone uncontroversial, of course I went straight for Jesus, and of course I went with autism. Now, I want to make it clear that I wasn't setting out to diagnose Jesus with autism. What I wanted to do, given that the Bible doesn't say whether Jesus was autistic or not, to ask what it would be like if Jesus was more like me than the people whose interpretations I had read. I will go into how I tried to do that in my workshop but I can truthfully say that it has enriched my life and faith in so many different ways. To discover a Jesus who is misunderstood like me, stims like me, gets overloaded like me, makes eccentric connections like me, who is different like me, and to count none of this a weakness: this has revolutionised my spiritual, ministerial, and personal life.