*Jason Byassee is a Methodist Minister from Vancouver who teaches preaching at Vancouver School of Theology. He is currently on sabbatical at Durham, and was invited to join the Archbishop of York’s team for the northern bishops’ Tell Serve Give mission in Liverpool. Jason blogged each day about his experiences. Read his first blog written on Wednesday 6 March here:*

A day of firsts.

It is the first day of the Liverpool mission undertaken by the bishops of the north of the Church of England, and me, a Methodist reporter-theologian tagging along from my sabbatical in Durham. I’ve never worn a clergy collar before. They asked me to for this trip, so I have one on. It looks like I’m in borrowed clothes.

I’ve never heard of Anglicans evangelizing before. Of course, logically an “unevangelized Christian” would be like a human being with no parents. Everyone who is a Christian only is because someone worked up the courage, charm, logic, and calloused hands to evangelize, love, reason, and serve them or their ancestors into Christian faith. Episcopalians where I’m from in the US south and Anglicans where I serve in Vancouver blush or convulse at the “e” word the way their grandmothers would have at talk of sex.

This mission only exists in the north because of the first African-descended bishop in the Church of England’s recent history. John Sentamu was the most prominent person of colour in the entire United Kingdom for a good decade before a few more recent appointments in government. He was encouraged in large-scale evangelism back home in his native Uganda before his opposition to Idi Amin landed him in jail and then in England as a refugee. In 2014, he and the other bishops in this region gathered on a retreat on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, from which Anglo-Saxon England was first evangelized by Irish monks in the 7th century. Inspired by such northern saints as Aidan, Cuthbert, Hilda and Bede, the bishops decided to go on mission in each others’ dioceses. On this mission we’ll be distributing ashes in public, preaching in stadiums and on the streets, praying with strangers, we’ll attend some 350 pre-planned events by churches in Liverpool, and hopefully we’ll be taking part with God in reintroducing himself to some of his children. Including, not least, those of us on mission. Someone has done mission in the Church of England before. Archbishop Sentamu has done it on several continents, and has the force of personality that when he says he’s going somewhere, you want to tag along.

What will we find? God’s beloved children, whom he loves. Some perhaps estranged, all more deeply in his care than they have any idea. I personally dislike being “evangelized” by Jehovah’s Witnesses on the Framwellgate Bridge in Durham, and by their nearby much more aggressive counterparts from some energy company trying to get us to switch providers. But I’m only a Christian at all because someone evangelized me. May that be so today for someone else. I have no idea who they are, what their name is. But God knows. God has counted the hairs on their head, and longed for relationship with them from before they were born.

Lord may we ask folks’ names. You already know them: they’re engraved on the palm of your hand. Bring about good fruit from whatever seeds we faulty farmers plant today. And bring your kingdom quickly. Amen.

