*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 on the mission, read about Friday 8 March here:*

Questions have a venerable place in the life of the church. Most catechisms are presented in question and answer format (Q. What is the chief end of humanity? A. To glorify God and enjoy him forever). Thomas Aquinas’s great Summa Theologiae is nothing more or less than a massive compilation of questions, and answers, and retorts to wrong answers, and rephrasing of new questions. Jesus had a way of asking more questions than he answered.

Archbishop John Sentamu is a worthy inheritor of this great legacy of question and answer. As good a preacher as he is, I find myself wishing we could hurry up and get to the Q&A. Today I saw him answer and ask questions of primary school kids, old gray heads, and everyone in between.

“What was your most exciting day?” a little girl asked.

“When I was born I was only 4 pounds. I wasn’t expected to survive, so I was baptized. I had to go to the hospital twice a month for five years. My doctors told me if I lived to be 10, I would survive. My tenth birthday was a celebration. But a friend of the family explained at my party about Jesus, who loved me so much and wanted to be my friend. That’s the most exciting thing ever.”

“What football team do you support?” a little boy asked.

“York City. I’m a patron. What team do you support?”

“Everton” (cheers and a few hisses here, presumably from Liverpool fans).

“What’s the future of ecumenism?” an old head asked.

“We talk too much about ecumenism. We need to get on with it. At the Last Supper Jesus did not give us a theory. He gave us a meal, and said take, eat, it’s good for you. Bishop John Jewel said the eucharist gives us the effects of Jesus’ resurrection. At his death, the temple curtain was torn, the dead were raised. Every time we take communion, we know the effects of the resurrection.”

“How can the church be relevant in this day of secularism?”

“Attempts to make the church relevant miss the point. We have to be counter-cultural, to swim against the tide. Bishop Robert Runcie said if you marry the spirit of the age, you will soon be a widow. Read the beatitudes: Jesus said ‘blessed are the poor, blessed are the peacemakers.’ The values of this world are opposed by the virtues of Christ: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

The archbishop had a few questions of his own. Preaching on the raising of Lazarus, he reflected on miraculous healings in his ministry. And also on their absence. “I don’t know why the Lord doesn’t heal everyone for whom we ask healing.

“I don’t know how he works. I just know that he does.” Including in questions, and answers, and new questions.

