*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 Saturday 9 March here:*

A member of our team overheard a conversation in the hotel lobby this morning. It went something like this:

“I really think that was the Archbishop of York.”

“What would the Archbishop of York be doing staying in a Premier Inn?”

“I’m telling you it was him.”

“Wearing trainers?!”

Thankfully, our team member overcame the temptation to intervene in this marital dispute. But for the record, Archbishops do stay in chain hotels and wear athletic shoes. From time to time.

Our day started in Formby on the shore of the Irish Sea. The plan was to join in with a team cleaning up this National Trust site before an evangelistic event on the beach. The problem was that the wind was too strong even to walk toward the beach, let alone to stand there and sing or listen to a sermon.

A few of us couldn’t resist at least glancing at the sea however. So we steeled ourselves and leaned into the wind and made for the water. The wind pushed back against us. Then the sand hit. It stung our faces and forced us to press our eyes shut. Still we pressed forward. Finally, as I stepped over the last sand dune, I heard the ocean’s roar. I pried my eyes open and for just a moment gazed at the Irish Sea. Its churn was an angry, gray-green boil. I mashed my eyes shut and turned back, pushed along by the wind. I have a feeling I’ll be discovering grains of sand in odd places on my head for days.

“Who is this?” the disciples asked, “that even the wind and the waves obey him?”

I loved that furious wind, those cantankerous waves. And I thought of God the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus compared to the wind. Sometimes God is God’s own evangelist, through God’s magnificent creation. “The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, and the archbishop preached beside those windswept dunes.

In one of our school visits this week, Archbishop Sentamu told a school assembly about the folks whom St. Paul evangelized in Acts 16. One was a wealthy cloth merchant named Lydia. Another was a slave girl, possessed by a demon. A third was a jailor (gaoler, in Britspeak). One rich woman, one marginalized girl, and one middle class career man. The church is a body that stretches across all kinds of people, from the wealthiest to the poorest. The teachers and staff at that school loved what they heard, and later offered their support to the formation of a Christian Union at the school, for which students had been praying.

Today we also spent time with all three sorts of people. Formby is a wealthy tourist town on the beach. We later spent time at a rugby stadium where an entertainer and evangelist did science experiments and presented the gospel to several hundred children and their parents—a solidly middle-class demographic, that. And we watched a soccer and rugby match at a pub near an estate in what the Brits often call “a deprived area,” where a vicar is doing fantastic work in a church plant that meets in the pub.

The archbishop’s message differed slightly in each setting, though its heart remained the same: God is with us, longs to be our friend, and came not to bring religion, but life.

A good word, from a man who stays in Premier Inns, wearing trainers.

