

+WEEKLY SERMON

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A shout out for Dads and lads

Six Nations Rugby, what's not to like? I enjoyed Saturday afternoon, glued to the TV screen. Ever since my son joined our local rugby club, I have loved watching this glorious game. Every size and shape welcome, courage, guts, speed and wonderful rugby hospitality. There's so many lessons for life learnt on a rugby pitch. In the early days, my son would hurl himself headlong to tackle me in the kitchen "Don't be afraid mum, or you'll get hurt". Ten years on, as a full-grown man, I am confident I would get hurt whether I was afraid or not!

Rugby made the news in other ways this last week. Neath RFC came under fire for using the slogan "No more girls". A similar slogan was dropped from the Yorkie chocolate bar in 2011. I listened to BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour as the chair was grilled for his social media faux pas, while his opponent spoke passionately about all the recent strides made to enable rugby to be accessible to women and girls. My formative years were in an all girls' school - most of which I reflect on very positively - though I am glad the no football and rugby ban has been lifted. I cried with joy when the Lionesses roared to victory in the 2022 Football World Cup.

But as a Mum of two boys (well, men) it left me reflecting on the erosion of all-male space in our society today. All female groups are still encouraged today – I benefit from number of these – networking and conferences. I delight to cheer on women leaders and invest in mentoring a number. But I notice that all male spaces don't have the same good press. They are often eyed with suspicion.

Rather, I was browsing a stationary shop while waiting for my train. "The Future is Female" declared the front cover of a notebook. A terrifying thought.

I was moved to hear of a programme in Colchester called Lads Need Dads to equip boys with life skills and confidence. 76% of men in prison have grown up without a father figure in their lives.

In the Bible there's lots of trailers for the day when heaven will come to earth and the whole of creation will be renewed in harmony. But interestingly one of the trailers is fathers and sons, as the birth of John the Baptist, Jesus's cousin is prophesied:

"And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their son and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1.17)

So whoever is on the rugby pitch, whoever lifts the trophy, here's a shout out for Dads and lads.

Bishop Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster

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