

12 07 09 The Tate family
Sermon preached at St. Bartholomew's Church Dinard
by Revd. Mervyn Kingston

You will be pleased to know that we have got a new family in church this morning. I'd like to introduce them to you. They are the Tate family. They have just moved to live in Dinard. The Tates have always gone to church every week, in each of the places where they have lived before they came here, and they have come to join us this morning and we want to make them really welcome.

I'd like you to meet Mr and Mrs Tate and their two adult children.

Mr DICK TATE stands for the person who must have his own way at all costs, and who objects to everything; otherwise he will leave the church. He has absolutely no regard for other people. He doesn't care who gets hurt, as long as he can maintain his own position of power and control and make sure that he has his own way. His favourite words are "WE DON'T WANT ANY CHANGE."

His wife is Mrs HESTER TATE – her friends call her HESI. Poor HESI is bad with her nerves. No wonder. She worries about every single thing down to the last detail, and have you noticed how she keeps putting things off. When it is proposed to do anything she is always unsure. She'll tell you to wait a while. Wait a few years, this is not the right time. When asked her views on local radio at the time of the introduction of the euro she said “This is not the right time. It would be much better to wait until all the old people have died.”

Another of her favourite sayings is “I don't think we can afford it. The church is always looking for money.” At other times you'll be told we've tried it all before and it hasn't worked. Or the most used six words in any church WE'VE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE, which in HESI's vocabulary also means and we've no intention of doing it either! Getting HESI to express her opinion on anything is very difficult, because she will never give you a definite answer. She always likes to sit on the fence – with a cushion.

When their first child was born Dick and Hesi decided to call him after his Italian uncle AGOSTINI. In school he was called AGI. Young AGI TATE can be an awkward customer. He never stops talking, usually about other people's faults. If there is any gossip, innuendo, or petty jealousy about, AGI will be in the thick of it stirring the pot. And then when trouble comes he keeps himself out of the way and someone else has to pick up the pieces. He is a professional moaner. He is always the first to complain, and if there is a worst interpretation to be placed on a neighbour's action that is the one that AGI will take. He left his last church because the minister didn't shake hands with him. His parents said he was quite right. They never liked that minister much anyway! They were so glad that they would be moving soon and coming to live here in Dinard!

We've met the son of the household, now it's time to meet the daughter. SARAH, PATRICIA, ELEANOR, CAROL TATE, known as Miss SPEC-TATE. She pays €1 a week for the privilege of criticising

the parson. Miss SPEC-TATE is the onlooker who knows the answer to every question. Of course she does, because she has had a very good education—she is completely self taught and is well informed on every subject. No matter what it is she will make sure that her views get pride of place. But she doesn't get round to doing anything herself, because she really doesn't want to become involved. After all she hasn't the time. She is too busy minding other people's business, instead of minding her own.

We've met our four friends DIC-TATE, HESI-TATE, AGI-TATE AND SPEC-TATE. You can see that Christianity has worn a little thin in this household. When all four members of this family get together, peace and harmony go out the window. The Tate family is to be found in every congregation. This morning it may be easy to think that we can identify our neighbours, but the harder question for all of us is do we recognise ourselves?

The best antidote to the TATE family is COMMITMENT, COURAGE AND PRAYER expressed in our daily living, along with LOVE, FAITHFULNESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS and PEACE (Ps.85;10 NIV).

“I will hear what the Lord God has to say: A voice that speaks of peace. Peace to his people and to his friends, and those who turn to him in their hearts.” (Ps.85:8 GNB)

We all know people whose Christian witness stands out in contrast to the Tate family. People like Mary Love, whose birthday was on Valentine’s Day. Mary was an auxiliary nurse in her local hospital. Mary raised thousands of pounds for the church by the sale of her handcrafts and tea cosies. Mary and her friend Joy became the first lady churchwardens in Down Cathedral. Their names are to be found in the hymn “All my hope on God is founded.” – “Love does stand at his hand, Joy doth wait on his command.”

Or Emma Daniel Gray the cleaning lady at the White House in USA for 24 years (1955–1979) who died June 8th, 2009. Each night

when she came to the president's chair, she would pause, cleaning materials in hand, and say a prayer for blessings, wisdom and safety for each of the six presidents she served. "She learned early that you set the tone for your environment," said her pastor, "That's why church was so important to her. . . . She preached her own eulogy by the life that she lived."

Or like Annie Boardman whom I met once 40 years ago. Annie brought up three children on her own and in 1968 was giving one tenth of her weekly income of £10 to the Mission Hall where she worshipped every Sunday. In the early 1960s Annie had been home help to Judge Curran. When Annie was going about her work she would often sing gospel songs. One day when the Judge's son Fr. Desmond Curran was at home he asked Annie, "What is that you are singing?" – It was the song, "O how I love Jesus, because he first loved me". – Annie said, "I am singing it because Jesus is my Saviour, and Mr. Curran, if you love Jesus, then he is your Saviour too."

God wants us to come to know him for ourselves, to enter into a personal relationship with him through faith in Jesus Christ crucified and risen. When we do that, we become part of God's real family, prepared to count the cost of promoting unselfish attitudes; willing to offer help and encouragement to others and to accept personal responsibility in the service of the kingdom of God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open our EARS to hear what you are saying to us, in the things that happen to us and in the people we meet. Open our EYES to see the needs of those around us. Open our HANDS to do our work well; to help where help is needed. Open our HEARTS to love you and our neighbour as you have loved us. Amen.