

“I thank the Lord that I’ve been blessed With more than my share of happiness”

These are not the opening lines you might expect from an ICF article, but as I left Liverpool cathedral and the end of a truly moving and uplifting funeral service for the legendary Sir Ken Dodd, it struck me that so much of what we had just witnessed, went to the very core of ICF’s vision and values. Household name comedians like Jimmy Tarbuck stood in the pulpit and after a memorising five minute stand-up routine, looked down at their papers, quietly announced “This Psalm meant a great deal to Ken” and went on to read some of the greatest words of our faith.



Contributors spoke of Ken having a destiny to be a comedian, or perhaps as we more often express it – a vocation. And the couplet above might have been written for the world of light entertainment, but reflects a profound belief, on the part of Ken Dodd, that his gift for comedy was God-given. He was an irrepressibly happy person, and quite simply he saw his purpose in life to share that happiness wherever he went.

People speak of there being “two faces of Doddy”, the manic, full-on comedian and a quiet, intelligent, reflective man of faith. In the few times I had the privilege of meeting him, I saw both. My first encounter with Doddy was at evensong in Liverpool Cathedral. I was the preacher, and I had already been tipped off that there was a strong chance that Sir Ken would be in the congregation. And so I found myself standing up before one of the greatest one-man entertainers in the world. Some time later, at a private gathering of clergy, I heard him speak of how the comic and the preacher share that same sense of lonely vulnerability, and that was certainly true for me that day.

I had always been taught the importance of eye contact as a preacher, and try as I did to avoid it, the moment came when my eyes met with those of the great man. What was he making of my performance? How could it even come near to him on the worst of bad days? But in that moment, I looked into the eyes of a man of faith – he was not in the slightest interested in “my performance” but the message of our shared faith.

Bishops and celebrities alike could not help but speak of Ken’s Christian faith, because it shone through every aspect of his life. In the city of Liverpool, story after story has emerged in recent days of ordinary people for whom Ken always had time. He lived out those Biblical values of putting the interests of others before your own, treating everyone equally and seeking to love everyone as a neighbour.

He may have been more at home in the variety theatre than a factory or office, but Ken Dodd is perhaps one of the greatest examples of a man who took his faith to work. His legendary four-hour shows, were not the product on an insatiable ego, but an utter commitment to those who had come to see him; unwilling to leave until he had given every last ounce of energy he could to them. Spending himself for the sake of their happiness.

It is no surprise therefore that his death would prompt a tweet from none other than the Archbishop of Canterbury (who as Dean of Liverpool was presiding at that Evensong where I first met Doddy). He too had seen that quiet respectful face of a sincere man of faith,

Few of us will ever have the chance to enjoy the limelight or the influence that Sir Ken Dodd did, but each of us can follow his example by seeking to live out our calling as Christian Disciples through whatever sphere of employment or vocation is ours to pursue.

Phil Jump