

Sunday was Visit My Mosque Day – an initiative established in 2015 to encourage people of all faiths and none to step inside a mosque, perhaps for the first time, and meet some of those who use it. So while I usually linger over my cup of tea after church on a Sunday morning, this week I hopped on my bike and headed to Bristol's Hizrat Bilal Centre.

Why? Because in today's diverse society, learning about different faiths and cultures matters. It helps us to understand those we live, work and study alongside. But sometimes it can be hard to know what to believe about Islam, or where to get different perspectives. I was keen to take part in Visit My Mosque as it offered a valuable opportunity to meet ordinary Muslims living locally, to hear first-hand about their beliefs, and see how these shape their lives.

For me, visiting different places of worship is also important because it is a chance to be a guest rather than a host. Christians talk a lot about the importance of welcome, and the Bible has plenty to say about hospitality. However as crucial as it is to offer this, it is also valuable to receive it. It was humbling to hear the imam thank everyone who had accepted the invitation to come, and see how genuinely pleased the mosque community were to have us there. It was clearly a joy to be sharing the space with so many visitors, and after our tour of the building we were urged to dig into a wonderful spread of refreshments. As a guest I learnt about another faith, but also reflected on my own, and where the two are similar and different.

If you missed out this weekend, don't despair! Many mosques run special events throughout the year, as do other places of worship. For example, Ramadan – the month when Muslims fast – takes place this year from mid-May to mid-June. During this period, many mosques invite people to join them for an iftar – the evening meal which breaks the fast. Nearer the time, check out <http://www.thebigiftar.org/> for details of events around the country.

In addition, many mosques are happy to receive visitors at any time. Why not get in touch with your local mosque and arrange to visit – perhaps with a group from your church? A single visit may not answer every question – and even if it could, one mosque isn't representative of Islam as a whole – but it's a great place to begin.

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