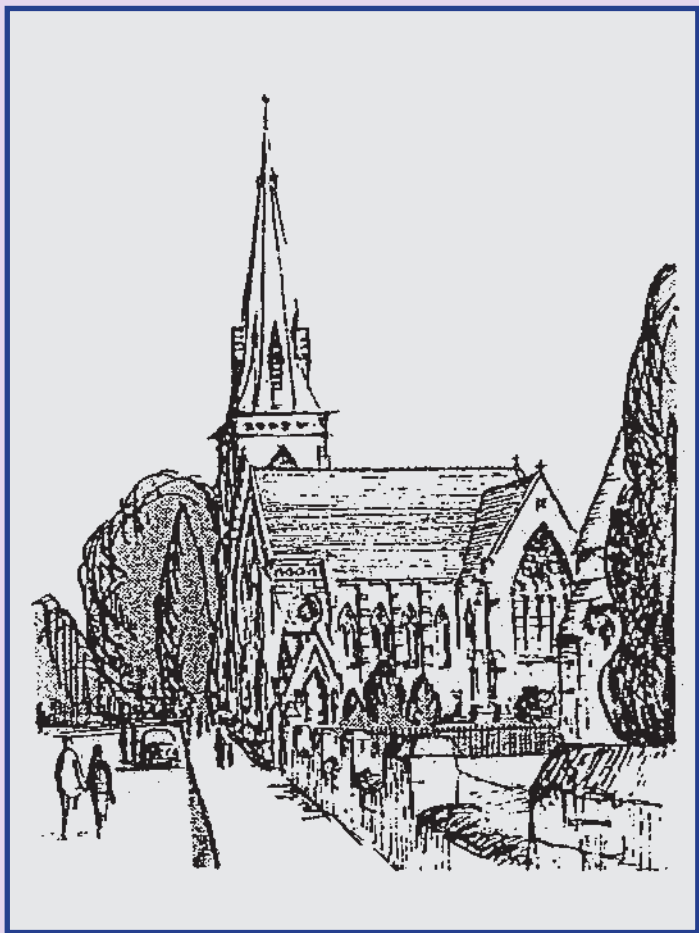




TRINITY TRIANGLE

NOVEMBER 2025



‘Serving God, serving each other, serving community’

TRINITY CHURCH

Methodist/United Reformed/Church in Abingdon

Conduit Road, Abingdon

TRINITY'S WEEK

Sunday Services at 10.30 am, occasionally in the evening.

Junior Church meets on the first Sunday morning of the month during the Church Service. It is designed for children who are aged 3+ and parents may stay with their children if they wish. Holy Communion is normally celebrated at 10.30 within the morning service as announced in the Calendar.

Monday	2.30 pm Evergreen Club: 3rd Monday in month. 5.30 pm Beavers. 6.45 pm Cubs. 7.30 pm Scouts.
Tuesday	7.30 pm Abingdon Operatic Society.
Wednesday	5.15 pm Brownies. 7.00 pm Guides.
Thursday	9.30 am Toddler Group. 7.30 pm Thursday Group. Ladies' Monthly Meeting 2nd Thursday in the month.
Friday	10.00 am Prayer Support Group (in their homes). 9.30am Coffee 10-10.45am. Abingdon Larder (SOFEA)
Monthly	7.30 pm Friendship Group - see calendar.

Conduit Centre, Conduit Road, Abingdon OX14 1DB

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November



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Prayer:

*Grant, O Lord, to all your people
Freedom from hatred and suspicion;
A desire to live together in peace;
A respect for the views of one another;
A true regard for your holy Word.
And may your peace be with us all,
Amen*

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Minister's Letter

My Soul Waits for the Lord!

Waiting in line for tickets, waiting for test or exam results, waiting for the birth of a first grandchild, waiting for the death of a loved one...

Last week, keen stargazers waited for the appearance of the first supermoon of the year – the hunter's moon, also referred to as the harvest moon. Ecumenical groups across the world waited for ten whole months before the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury was announced and the whole world waits for just and civil relationships between people and among communities and nations.

Waiting is woven into salvation history. God's people, Israel, waited forty years before they could enter the Promised Land. Centuries later, they waited nearly seventy years to be freed from exile; and after that, they waited for the Messiah to come! On a more individual level, Hannah and Elkanah (parents of Samuel) and Elizabeth and Zechariah (parents of John the Baptist) waited years for answers to prayer. All that waiting is summed up beautifully in the Psalmist's prayer, "Surely, I wait for the Lord; who bends down to me and hears my cry" (Ps 40:2).

The four weeks before Christmas, the season of Advent, is a time of preparation and expectation for the coming celebration of our Lord's nativity, and for the final coming of Christ "in power and glory." "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." During this season, the lectionary readings point us to the birth of Christ and also challenge the modern reluctance to confront the theme of divine judgement. As Christians, we are encouraged to actively recommit ourselves to bringing the Kingdom of God into our lives and that of our communities.

Advent is a time of waiting on the Lord and for the Lord, but in Advent we wait in a special way. To quote Henri Nouwen, "Waiting is not a passive thing. It is an active waiting in which we live the present moment to the full, in order to find there the signs of the One we are waiting for." (The Path of Waiting). So, in scripture, we are invited to stay awake and be ready. Jesus tells us that we are to be on guard, "alert at all times, praying that [we] may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:36)

So, we wait. We wait at bus stops, in supermarket queues, in waiting rooms and in schools. During the forthcoming season of Advent,

- let us wait expectantly for the birth of Jesus who is also the one on whom we have been waiting to bring peace and justice on earth.

- let us make space to wait - slow down from the busyness of life and technology, to prepare our hearts and minds for what is to come: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." (Isaiah 2:3)
- let us wait with unwavering hope – with the assured certainty that the Kingdom of God will come to execute justice and righteousness.

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord,

Keep watch, take heart.

(Taizé)

Every blessing,
Georgina

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

We give thanks for the life of Christine Hutchinson who died on Wednesday 8 October. Her funeral took place in Trinity Church, at 2pm on Thursday 23 October. This was followed by the burial at St Mary's Church, North Leigh. There was an opportunity afterwards to celebrate and share memories of her wonderful life. We send our love to Isabel and the family.

Over 30 boxes were completed for the House of Opportunity Christmas Box Appeal and £55 was donated towards the cost of sending them. Many thanks to everyone who donated gifts and helped to pack them and to

Abingdon Foodbank have written to thank Trinity for the 54kg of donations after our Harvest Festival, and also for the generosity in giving week by week.

Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been unwell recently or have been unable to come to church.

Funeral

On 23rd October Christine Hutchinson, aged 97

"In You, Father, we are one family in earth and heaven"

Christine Hayes Hutchinson

A tribute from the family

The life of a remarkable woman, Christine Hayes Hutchinson. Born on the 17th of October 1928 in Colchester, Essex. Christine was the middle of three children, Joyce the eldest and Andrew the youngest, and grew up in a loving home with her parents, Grace and Vincent. Her early years were filled with seaside holidays, church life at Lion Walk Congregational, and laughter shared with the family. At Colchester High School for Girls, she showed a natural curiosity and a love of learning, excelling in music and sport alike. She took piano to Grade 8 and loved to sing, play tennis and netball, and dance. During the war, she remembered the whine of doodlebugs overhead and the rush to the Anderson shelter under the dining room table. Yet she also recalled mugs of hot chocolate, family closeness, and faith that kept them strong. Encouraged by teachers, Christine sang her first solo, Bach's 'Sheep may graze safely', planting the seed for a long-term love of music. After school, she studied cookery and earned her City and Guilds Teacher's Certificate while working for a photographer in Frinton-on-Sea, developing both skill and artistry. Alongside this, she studied piano and voice, becoming a talented semi-professional soprano, performing in churches and festivals, even in Hereford Cathedral.

Music also brought her love. At 16, she met Alan, a tall, auburn-haired young man with a fine tenor voice. Together, they sang duets and soon harmonised in life. In 1950, they married at Lion Walk Church, beginning a lifelong partnership built on faith, music and laughter. They built their first home in Colchester, raising two children Ian and Isabel, surrounded by warmth, creativity, and the family's beloved boxers. Christine threw herself into church life, teaching, leading youth groups, and cooking for camps, always with joy and energy. In 1967, the family moved to Poole, where Christine joined the Bournemouth Municipal Choir and continued performing while teaching cookery and nutrition at Poole College. Family holidays to France and Spain were full of sunshine, laughter, and camping adventures. Later in Abingdon, she became deeply involved in Trinity Church, arranging flowers, running the card stall, leading the choir for nearly three decades, volunteering as a hospital driver, supporting the Traidcraft charity and organising many fundraising events. She also taught at the Ewart Place School of Cookery in Oxford for 10 years.

Christine was a woman of deep faith kindness and quiet strength. She found beauty in small things, a walk with the dog, a pressed flower, a shared cup of tea. She poured love into her children and later into her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Samuel, George and Charlie remember hot squash and biscuits left outside their bedroom doors when they stayed with her, and seaside holidays in Frinton and boating adventures where Gigi would anchor the raft with a full milk carton full of sand to stop it floating away. She and Alan enjoyed music to the end, trips to the opera, the Three Choirs Festival, and their 50th and 60th wedding anniversary, surrounded by family and friends.

Alan's sudden passing in 2012 was a profound loss, but with faith and family, Christine found strength. She moved into a smaller home in North Leigh, keeping herself active and independent, joining an art group, a Bible study, a local garden society, and volunteering at the Sue Ryder Shop in Woodstock. She made close friends, kept her lipstick on for walks, and still drove in her mid-90s, remarkable and inspiring to everybody who knew her. She loved outings with Isabel, garden centres, art galleries, and quiet walks through Quicken Copse among the white birch, often hugging and talking to them when she could. They were not just mother and daughter, but best friends. Enjoying time away together on coastal excursions, often incorporating visits to family and friends too. Even after her serious car accident earlier this year, she recovered with grace, enjoying times with family, dancing the conga, doing jigsaws, and watching birds through her opera glasses. She adored animals, especially donkeys, and delighted in feeding the sheep with her grandson, Angus, who called her Gigi and Oscar, too. Christine's elegance, humour, and warmth shone through everything. Whether teaching, singing, or simply chatting with a stranger, she made people feel cared for. She was still volunteering, shopping, and visiting family at 96. living proof of the joy that comes from faith, purpose and love.

She was a wonderful mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, gracious, funny and full of life. We will miss her deeply, but we are so thankful for the years that we shared and the example that she set, to live fully, love generously and never stop singing. Christine's life was rich, not just in years, but in faith, beauty and gratitude. Though her voice may now be silent, the melody she leaves behind will carry on, in her family, her music, and the countless lives that she touched along the way. Christine, may you rest in peace.

Our TrinityLearning Trustee, Petronella, writes about her visit to Larkmead School in September for their 'Make a Difference' Volunteer Week celebration.

Make a Difference week at Larkmead school is when the nearly 100 Year 12 pupils choose a social enterprise to join for a week. This culminated recently in an impressive and heartwarming presentation of their experiences to a packed school hall with all the sixth form, and representatives from the hosting organisations, as audience.

Individual groups had worked with Abingdon Bridge, Yellow Submarine, SOHA, Survivor Space, OCVA, South Oxfordshire Family Space, Food Bank, SOFEA, Dunmore School, Medical Research, computing in San Francisco, and of course TrinityLearning.

These social care organisations provided opportunities for small groups of Larkmead students to meet, understand, and find ways of supporting people. Over five days each group gave physical help, found activity ideas, held discussions, made eye-catching promotion advertisements and created websites.



Photo shows Larkmead students taking part in TrinityLearning's Toolkit for Happiness project as part of their Make a Difference Week.

For the presentation, each group came to the stage with prepared on screen photos and films, every individual contributing as to how their group had supported their chosen charity.

Most groups were made up of six to eight students, though TrinityLearning had eighteen volunteers who were trained in leadership – working with Year 7 pupils, sharing indoor and outdoor activities with them to promote their self-confidence and wellbeing.

The overall impression of the presentation was of mutually supportive collaboration within the Year 12 groups, and of kindness and hard work providing satisfaction and goodwill.

Drinks and cake for all participants after the presentation ended a splendid occasion.

Petronella Rasmussen

Calling knitters and crocheters - As many of you know TrinityLearning gives out a tiny handmade teddy with each Bereavement Pack provided to support a recently bereaved child. Last school year we have gave out 17 bears and so we are looking to restock. If you are able to knit or crochet please could you consider making a tiny bear? We provide everything you need. If you are interested in helping with this please email Nicola at nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com.



ADVENT - Joint Study Group

Advent is a time of waiting and preparation – waiting for the birth of Jesus and preparing ourselves for his coming. This year there will an Advent Bible study for All Saints and Trinity in the weeks leading up to Christmas, led by Revd. Carol Hamilton-Foy, to help us to prepare once more for Jesus' birth.

Each of the 4 sessions will be on a Friday afternoon from 2-3.30pm in the Perry Room at All Saints and each one stands alone so don't worry if you cannot make all of them – just come when you can. The sessions are:

- Friday November 28th – Light in the Darkness – the People of God
- Friday December 5th – Trust in the Promises – the Prophets
- Friday December 12th – Hope in the Wilderness – John the Baptist
- Friday December 19th – Joy in the Unexpected – Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Each week we will look at passages of Scripture relating to the birth of Jesus, in both the Old and the New Testaments, together with music and reflection.

All are welcome.

NOVEMBER



Sun 2nd	10.30am	Morning Worship led by members of the congregation
Mon 3rd	5.00pm	Beavers 6.45pm Cubs 7.30pm Scouts
Wed 5th	5.15pm	Brownies 7.00pm Guides
Thurs 6th	9.30am	Trinity Toddler Group
Fri 7th	10.30am	Virtual Prayer Support Group
	9.30am	Coffee 10.00 – 10.45am SOFEA Larder
Sun 9th	10.30am	Morning worship led by Revd. Alan Grist Remembrance Sunday. Holy Communion
Mon 10th	5.00pm	Beavers 6.45pm Cubs 7.30pm Scouts
Wed 12th	5.15pm	Brownies 7.00pm Guides
Thurs 13th	9.30am	Trinity Toddler Group
	7.30pm	Thursday Group: Dolls' house furniture and craft Wendy Glover
Fri 14th	10.30am	Virtual Prayer Support Group
	9.30am	Coffee 10.00 – 10.45am SOFEA Larder
Sun 16th	10.30am	All-age Morning Worship, led by Georgina
Mon 17th	5.00pm	Beavers 6.45pm Cubs 7.30pm Scouts
	2.30pm	Evergreen: 'Memoir'
Wed 19th	5.15pm	Brownies 7.00pm Guides
Thurs 20th	9.30am	Trinity Toddler Group
Fri 21st	10.30am	Virtual Prayer Support Group
	9.30am	Coffee 10.00 – 10.45am SOFEA Larder
Sun 23rd	10.30am	Morning Worship led by Revd. Nigel Ogle
Mon 24th	5.00pm	Beavers 6.45pm Cubs 7.30pm Scouts
Wed 26th	5.15pm	Brownies 7.00pm Guides
Thurs 27th	9.30am	Trinity Toddler Group
Fri 28th	10.30am	Virtual Prayer Support Group
	9.30am	Coffee 10.00 – 10.45am SOFEA Larder
Sun 30th	10.30am	Morning Worship led by Revd. Pauline Main Advent Sunday



Sun 7th 10.30am Morning Worship led by members of the congregation.

**Deadline for December / January issue of Triangle
Friday 21st November**

**Please send contributions to Cynthia (cynbartlett@yahoo.co.uk)
AND to Val (vadalby17@gmail.com) or via the Office**

**TRINITY EVERGREEN CLUB
MONDAY 17TH NOVEMBER**

2.30PM

**‘Memoir and why you should record memories’
by Sylvia Vetta**

There will be a raffle and refreshments

Thoughts for Remembrance Day

Give praise to God for his gift of life.

Give thanks to God for those who gave their lives.

Give praise to God for his gift of peace

Pray for peace among all God's children.

Church Twinning Weekend in St Niklaas, 2-6 October 2025

Early in the morning of Thursday 2nd October 6 people from Abingdon set off in a comfortable 9 seater mini bus driven by Astrid Nielsen from Peachcroft Christian Centre. Her husband Ben was the co-driver and the rest of the group comprised Christine Hutt from Abingdon Baptist Church, John Clare from St Michael's, Sue Robbins from Christ Church Long Furlong and me (Margaret Greaney) from Trinity.

We eagerly anticipated the themed weekend. First was the celebration of 100 years of the Evangelical Church and second was the tighter bonds with the Romanian Orthodox Church, both in St Niklaas.

After a very pleasant uneventful drive crossing the Channel via the shuttle we had time for a coffee stop by the seaside in Belgium so that we did not arrive at the Deanery in St Niklaas too early for the welcome gathering. There were also 5 visitors from our twin town of Argentan and 4 visitors from Magura Livei in Romania. The contacts in Romania started after the fall of Ceausescu in 1989 when some people in St Niklaas decided to adopt this town and give it much needed support in practical ways. After coffee and cake we all went into the restored chapel of St Lucia where much ecumenical work is done with patients of the psychiatric hospital as there are weekly services for both catholic and protestant patients.



Everyone went off to their host families. Christine and I both stayed with a delightful young couple from the Evangelical Protestant church. They had a 10 month old baby girl who was so happy to have the attention of two elderly foreign ladies to play with her. After a delicious Belgian meal we had a good night's rest to prepare for the long day ahead on Friday

Friday was spent in Antwerp. We were a large group of 15 visitors plus our Belgian guides and some hosts. First we went to the cathedral where we were ushered into a side room to listen to the account of the work carried out by a lovely young lady who was a Roman catholic chaplain in a large overcrowded detention centre. She worked with women of all faiths and none and we could have spent much longer with her as she

truly loved her work. We spent some time looking around the beautiful Cathedral before walking around Antwerp in different groups and eating street food. In the afternoon, we met up again under the statue of Rubens in the main square to take a tram to Wilrijk to visit the Romanian Orthodox Church there. We were warmly welcomed by Pope Georg who



had prepared an excellent PowerPoint presentation on the history of the Orthodox church in the world while we sipped on welcome cool drinks and sampled Romanian biscuits. After several tram changes we arrived back at the Deanery in St Niklaas where dinner hosts were waiting to take us to their homes for an evening meal. We all had a very pleasant evening meeting new people and old friends.



On Saturday the weather was not very good so we were pleased to be staying in St Niklaas and meeting in the town centre. At Our Lady's Church we were shown around by a local guide. From there we walked to

a house where a charity called VLOS was located. This is a voluntary organisation to support refugees from all over the world who do not have official papers and have nowhere else to go. It was a thought-provoking experience and saddening to hear the stories of some of the people we met there.

The next stop was a visit to the Evangelical Protestant church where the pastor told us about the 100 year history of the church in a predominantly Catholic country. Then on to the town hall for a reception with the Mayor of St Niklaas. All this before lunch. Lunch was a soup and sandwich meal provided for us at the Romanian Orthodox church in St Niklaas after we listened to a talk about their church and its history. There was then some free time in St Niklaas to visit a museum and buy some Belgian chocolates before being picked up at the Deanery again to be whisked off by car



to Nieuwkerken-Waas to a local restaurant where we were served enormous helpings of traditional Flemish stew. This was followed by the highlight of the Centenary celebrations of the Evangelical church. A group of young people acted the whole of St Mark's gospel. Although

the performance was in Flemish it was completely able to be understood in any language and we knew where exactly they were in the story. We left at 9 am and didn't return to our hosts until after 10 pm, making it a very long day.

On Sunday we all went to a different church. I went to Our Lady's church with my dinner hosts from Friday evening and they had printed the bible readings for the day in English for me so that could follow the mass. Lunch was with our host



families after which Christine and I had a nice walk with them. At 6pm we all met again in the centre. This time it was St Nicolas church for a final ecumenical time of worship together before setting off for the Deanery again for more food, Belgian beer and farewells.

We certainly had a lot to think about and discuss on the return journey to Abingdon on Monday.

Margaret Greaney

Sermon given by Revd John Anderson 14th September 2025

‘When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together, and says to them, ‘I am so happy I found the coin I lost. Let us celebrate!’

(Luke 15: 9)

There was a time when, if I lost anything, I would, figuratively speaking, wear sack cloth and ashes for days, and be generally impossible to live with, until I found whatever it was I had misplaced (rarely lost!). Put it in a secret place so secret that you forget where it is!! Is this a male thing? In contrast I have been married to two women (not at the same time!) who lose things on a regular basis to the point that their reaction is “Oh, it will turn up at some point” which, translated means “please will you find it for me, dear”

It is the motivation behind the desire to find something lost that Luke wants us to focus our attention on in these two parables. This is another of those stories where Jesus finds himself within a meal, this time with a mixed company - “tax collectors and other outcasts” in other words those who were considered to be lost, and “Pharisees and the teachers of the law”, those who were in the business of defining who was lost and what they could and could not do, and how they were to be found, saved or redeemed.

In contrast to the parable of the prodigal son or forgiving father, in these two parables that which has been lost is in some senses passive. The parables start with a situation which sounds familiar – a shepherd loses one of the flock of sheep – even today this still takes place, even in Wales, where it is alleged, there are more sheep than people. I remember a TV programme with Kate Humble interviewing a man who is employed to round up sheep which have wandered off and who need to be returned to their rightful owners. In the other parable, a woman loses one of her 10 drachma – we aren’t told the importance of this missing coin but given her efforts to find it, it has considerable importance.

The two scenarios are interesting. If you have a hundred sheep, or a hundred of anything, it is quite an achievement to notice that one has gone missing. You either have to count them on a regular and frequent basis, which with sheep would be a challenge, or you have to know them intimately, perhaps by name. In the second story, we have a woman of independent and substantial means; whereas the sheep has wandered off of its own accord, the woman blames herself for losing the coin.

There is a temptation here to over-allegorise them (is that a word?) into stories about repentance, but that is a temptation we need to resist. The image of the shepherd is clearly that of God – OT images and references abound – Psalm 23 “The Lord is my Shepherd” is an obvious example – but as Luke pairs these two parables together, I’m sure that what Jesus is getting at is not the repentance of sheep or the coin – hardly – but two things – the absolute commitment to finding that which is lost and “there will be joy in heaven” when those who are lost are found.

Action verbs predominate for the shepherd, and not the sheep: leave, go after, finds, lays it on his shoulders, rejoices, comes home, and calls together his friends. The same holds for the woman: light a lamp, sweep the house, search carefully, finds, and calls together her friends. The parallels here show that the emphasis is on the finding and the one committed to find the otherwise hapless lost sheep and passive lost coin; and also the sharing of joy when that which has been lost is found.

We need to be careful that we don't paint the Jewish nation of the first century with the same brush as the grumbling Pharisees and teachers of the Law. What Jesus is doing here is re-iterating an eternal truth that is woven throughout the tapestry of the Old Testament – that our God is a God whose heart is set on seeking the lost children and restoring them to a relationship with God. Remember that Luke has these parables told by Jesus within the setting of a meal with tax collectors and others who might be considered as lost, within the first century Jewish context. These two parables are connected in some ways with the parable known as the Prodigal Son, where the main emphasis is on the change of heart of the younger son. But not here – the lost sheep doesn't suddenly come to its senses as it wanders away after greener grass, and the coin doesn't ... well, it just doesn't. But these two parables place the emphasis on the One who comes and seeks the lost

And that should be a huge comfort to us. When we feel lost ... when we feel alone ... when the flame of faith dims low ... when we are surrounded by doubts ... then be reminded that the Good Shepherd comes looking for us. In the darkness and chaos of our current world and national situation, God is still seeking us out.

A few days ago was the anniversary of the events in the USA that have become known as “9/11” when four aircraft were hijacked and flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon and the remaining plane was heading towards Washington but crashed in Pennsylvania after its passengers overcame the hijackers. The attacks killed nearly 3,000 people, injured over 6,000 others, caused at least \$10 billion in property and infrastructure damage, and \$3 trillion in total costs.

It didn't make much of a story on the news here but for my friends in the US, it is a poignant reminder of a day when the world changed in a significant way, and a time to remember that those who survived, especially those who were first responders and survived, are still fighting for appropriate medical and physiological help, many years later.

In my opinion, this event of 11th September 2001 changed our world. It placed Islam and Muslims in a differing light, souring relationships for those who didn't know better – and that still goes on. There are still those who are stating in public that all Muslims are terrorists, and that happens in this country as well. It led to the war in Afghanistan, from which it can argued came the rise of ISIS and HAMAS and the conflicts we now see in the middle-east plus the ongoing difficulties within Afghanistan itself.

Is this world lost? Are we less certain of the future than we were before 9/11? I would argue that we are; it's certainly how I feel. When we see or read or hear of the burning forests in the Amazon, the melting glaciers in Iceland, political chaos in many countries including our own, where do we find hope for our generation and the next? If we have faith in the God who comes and searches for us, out of love, driven by the nature of who God is; then ought we not to do the same?

The two parables have one more thing in common – both the man that had lost his sheep and the woman who lost the coin are concerned that what they had – the flock of 100 sheep and the 10 coins – were now incomplete. This would not have been lost on a Jewish audience – the man and the woman hunted down what was lost not only because of value, but also to make complete what had been made incomplete.

So the nature of God is to seek out with love and passion that which is lost – but with the same love and passion, seeks to make complete that which has been made incomplete.

God seeks to build community and to ensure that these communities are whole and healthy and not divided. And if that is the nature of God, then surely our calling as disciples of Christ, the human embodiment of the nature of God, is “to go and do likewise”

In whatever small way that we can, we need to echo that love of God to seek out the lost and to re-build broken communities.

Can we really do anything? You may remember when a 15 year old girl, Greta Thunberg, goes on strike every Friday with the tag line that says something like “what's the point of school if there isn't going to be a world for us to grow into”. Now 22 she remains a focus for climate action and peace.

In 2016 Mother Teresa of Calcutta was made a saint, another contemporary example of one who was passionate about seeking out the lost.

'The greatest evil,' Mother Teresa used to say, 'is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference toward one's neighbour who lives at the roadside, assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease.' Her response to pain and need was to do little things, with love.

Her mantra “do small things with love” – I wonder, can we do that? And you may well say to me, yes we are, as best as we are able. In various ways, we help those who are struggling with life, the poor, the needy, the foreigner, the widow .. all those that Christ told us to look out for. Yes, we can always do more but we do what we do. No doubt you recognise there is no place for complacency, for as Jesus said “the poor will always be with you.”

But I want to pose a slightly different question. If you agree with me that our calling as Christ's disciples is to go and seek the lost, then I want to ask “who are the lost?” Are there any of God's children who have gone missing and we may not have noticed?

In one of those what I call divine coincidences, as I was thinking about lost sheep,

coins and the Kingdom of God, I am also reading a book called “Among the Trolls: My journey through Conspiracyland” by Marianna Spring.

Now you are forgiven if you are thinking about three billy goats and Norwegian nasties, but Marianna’s book is about even more sinister goings on. Marianna Spring is a journalist for the BBC who specialises in seeking out misinformation and reality checking conspiracy theories, and her book gives some indication as to the who and the why behind these lies. And also the threats that she has endured as part of her investigations.

Conspiracy theories have abounded for centuries. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Catholic and Jewish communities were accused of various things such as poisoning water wells or threatening to take over the government. In the Victorian era, pamphlets were produced to expound various theories, Jack the Ripper and connections to the Royal Family being possibly the most famous, although my favourite is the reality of faeries that was enthusiastically promoted by Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes. As differing media became available for the promotion of these theories, they became more famous more quickly. The anti-Catholic theme continued with theories around the assassination of President Kennedy; and as we know, there are those who believe that Elvis is still alive, aged 90.

With the advent of the internet and the development of social media, conspiracy theories or fake news can be highly influential and damaging to the common good. Anyone, with smart phone or computer with internet connection can access any conspiracy that rocks their boat, or even become that most modern of occupations, an “influencer”. Modern ‘fake news’ can range from the farcical – on 9/11 the twin towers were demolished deliberately as part of a sinister plot by the government; or that the moon landings were staged on a Hollywood movie stage.

However, they can be dangerous to our democracy – one common factor about conspiracy theories throughout the ages is disillusionment with the government of the time. QAnon is a theory beloved of some on the far right of American politics, that a cabal of Satanic child molesters is at the heart of American political life. Other conspiracy theory puts forward the idea that only the very rich and famous – Trump, Elon Musk and similar are qualified to govern and rule.

What I have learned from the writings of Marianna Spring and her investigative work into the conspiracy theories is that the people who believe them are not necessarily the weird and the wonderfully confused, but ordinary people who have become ... lost. People from various walks of life, levels of education, class, or whatever grouping you may want to use. The common factors are disillusionment with politics, climate, religion, NHS in this country, institutions in general, state of our country (regardless of country!) and so on.

They have lost something to believe in, something to cling on to, something to give their life structure and even meaning. So they grab onto a passing theory

which rocks their boat, even if or probably because, they feel their boat is sinking. As I suggested earlier, if we, as the church, are to be ones called to find those who are lost, then the world of social media, influencers, fake news and conspiracy theories creates for us a huge challenge.

I would suggest that our churches need to take up the challenge of promoting the gospel through all aspects of social media with much more energy than they are at the moment. In my view, it is no longer a “nice to have” as a side line, it needs to become much more as one of our main ways of offering the truth of Christ to those who are lost. To each of you I offer you the suggestion that you listen carefully to what you hear or read or see through whatever media and be prepared to at least question it or indeed challenge it.

And listen to your friends and family; are they in danger of disappearing down the dark rabbit holes of conspiracy theory world? We may feel that there is nothing we can do – I would counter that by saying, at the very least, we can do our best to reflect God’s love back into the world, seeking those who are lost by reaching out and doing small things with love.

And then, like the shepherd, the woman, and the angels in heaven, we will rejoice and celebrate because in a small way, a child of God has found their way home, and our world has become a better place, as God intended.

Amen

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