

RECOGNISING RELATIONSHIPS

READING: John 21, verses 15-22

The Brownies recorded their own video clips about what being a good friend was all about.

We have heard a lot about good friends- thank-you Brownies. I am glad that you have good friends and that you know how to be a good friend.

Right now, we are finding out just how important good friends are:

- We are cheering for the people working in our health services who work long hours in dangerous conditions to make sick people well
- We are so glad of other emergency services, postal deliverers, shop workers, food deliveries, bin men, kind neighbours who offer help
- And of course, we are so glad of our friends. Even if we cannot meet up with them, we can talk to them and see them on whatsapp or facetime or zoom. (I am learning the lingo...)
- We are living in a strange and rather frightening time and more than ever we need our friends; people who are there for us.

In this church, for many years now, we have had a system of Pastoral Visitors.

When someone has started coming regularly to the church and wants to join in, we give them a Pastoral Visitor. And basically, this Pastoral Visitor is there to be a friend. To talk to them at church, maybe meet up with them outside church, make sure they are OK, be there for them when they are having a difficult time. And at the moment we are so grateful to our Pastoral Visitors because they are keeping in touch with all their people whilst we cannot meet together in church.

And not only do we have Pastoral Visitors, we also have what are called Link Visitors. Each church sponsored group, including all the Scouting and Guiding Groups have their Link Visitor-someone who will pop in to the group and say Hello; often they will help if it is your group's turn to lead Church Parade; there for the Leaders to talk to; let the rest of us know if there are any problems.

If YOU belong to any of these groups- do you know who your Link Visitor is? If not, keep watching, because their names will come up on the screen a bit later.

But now, let's hear what one of our church members has to say about her Pastoral Visitor.....

TINA WHEELER speaks:

I became a member at St John's in the early nineties, and was allocated a Pastoral visitor fairly soon thereafter. The system was still relatively new, as I now know, and it was very much a visiting sort of relationship, although mostly she would invite me to visit her because I had small children at the time, and she felt it would be a rare opportunity for me to have an uninterrupted conversation. We didn't know each other to begin with, but she was always a friendly face on a Sunday and an encouraging presence as I gradually became more involved in church life.

Having been around much longer, I did know my current Pastoral Visitor before she took on the role. Our relationship is much more a case of “we’ll catch up on a Sunday, but I’m here if you need me”. It is wonderful to know that there is someone at the end of the phone if I need a chat, or who will join me for a cuppa, or a drink, if I have something I need to think through. With the best will in the world, one’s nearest and dearest are not always the right people to talk to! I know that I can rely on her for wise words, or if I don’t need words, just a listening ear. There have been a few times when I have called on her for support when I have been struggling – on one occasion she was able to drop everything to put me back together after a particularly difficult moment, but in between, if she hasn’t heard from me, she knows I am OK. Our relationship feels, at least to me, very relaxed. I hope she would agree! And I have to add that there have also been many times when we have shared good times and laughter. I count myself very blessed to have her as my Pastoral Visitor. Both my Pastoral Visitors, in their different ways, have encouraged me to try new things and to get more deeply involved. I don’t hold the fact that I have ended up in the role of church secretary against either of them!

Thank-you, Tina.

In the story from the Bible which we heard earlier, did you hear what Jesus was telling Peter? He was telling Peter to be a good friend.

You see, Jesus had been the best friend Peter had ever had and Jesus knew that he, himself, would not be around for much longer- at least, not as the kind of friend you can hug and eat fish and chips with. Jesus would always be there for Peter but not so that Peter could see him.

Jesus knew that Peter would get lonely and have days when he thought Jesus had gone and left him for good.

So, Jesus says to Peter- Do you love me?

Peter says, Yes, of course I do. You know I do.

And Jesus says, “then take care of my sheep.”

Jesus did not mean real sheep, woolly sheep who say BAA

He meant people; people like us. Because he had called himself The Good Shepherd who looks after his sheep.

Jesus needed people like Peter to care about his sheep; he needed strong, loving men and women to be good friends to his people, just as we need strong, loving men and women to be Pastoral and Link Visitors who will care for all the people in our church family.

But Jesus also knew that Peter himself, needed to be a good friend. You see, being a good friend to others would actually help him to feel that he was still close to Jesus.

By loving the people Jesus loved, he would know that he was still loving Jesus and that Jesus was still loving him.

Another of Peter’s good friends- John- that is, our St John- said God is Love. Those who love, live in God and God lives in them.

That is really awesome but it makes a lot of sense.

For life itself -all life-the whole of the universe is about inter-connectedness. Everything is connected to something else. Nothing exists completely on its own. So, if there is a God, then God must be all about connectedness; about people coming together and forming relationships and creating communities. So, the more we learn to love each other, the more we learn about God's love for us and about our place in all the vast inter-connectedness of the world.

Going to hear now from a Pastoral Visitor-Mair Murdoch.

I have been a Pastoral Visitor for many years, since it was set up by a former minister, Michael Rees, about 25 years ago. I remember, at the time, Liz Sutton's son, Christopher, had just started school!

At that time, we were told to arrange a visit a few times a year. We were advised to be good listeners, not to give advice and to remember that confidentiality is important.

Over the years, being a pastoral visitor has become much more relaxed. Home visits have often become replaced by going out together for coffee and a chat, or catching up with a phone call, what's app or email. On Sundays, at church, there is often an opportunity, too, for a chat.

With the very elderly or housebound, I think they enjoy and need more regular home visits and phone calls. Generally, just keeping in touch in any way is important.

Occasionally, if someone is experiencing an issue of some kind, more frequent contact is needed over that period.

I have been a pastoral visitor to a selection of age groups. I think a pastoral visitor is like a friend – someone who is there for you, someone you can talk to in confidence at any time. Over the years, the families I have been a pastoral visitor for have become close friends of mine.

Pastoral Visitors play an important part in the life of St. John's and if you are approached to consider becoming a pastoral visitor, I would recommend it as I have found it to be very rewarding.

Thank you Mair.

The message I invite you to take with you for the weeks ahead is- love each other and look after each other.

Because this is how you will get to know God; and this is how you will stay close to Jesus and we need the love and the strength of Jesus during these most difficult and frightening times.

This is not what I (rudely) call “fluffy-bunny religion.” It is about the way the whole world and the whole universe works. It is about real life and real people. love is all about God and God is all about love.

When you get the chance, say a big thank-you to your pastoral Visitor, if you have one; to your Link Visitor if you are part of a group and to anyone whose friendship and support are helping you to cope with what is going on right now.

