

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT



Grantchester

Dear Friends,

It isn't far to Cambridge from Hertford, a trip we enjoy from time to time. And in the environs of that great University City there is the village of Grantchester. One day I really must ensure that we go there, especially since the television series of the same name.

Of course, James Norton will not be there – well, probably not, no harm in hoping – and it might not even be the location used for the series, but it's a great thought. At least, the pastoral tranquillity of those Grantchester meadows look lovely, just as they sound very attractive in Pink Floyd's beautiful 1971 tribute to the area.

The Grantchester novels, which have been made into a television series, were written by James Runcie, which is another local connection for us. His father was Robert Runcie who was Bishop of St Albans over thirty years ago, and went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury.

Before such greatness he was, of course, a parish priest and James would have been brought up in a Vicarage and become very familiar with parish life. The characters in the stories reflect a lot of parish and church life, with its inevitable ups and downs, its inspiration and its challenges.

The series does, however, have some intriguing aspects to it. Firstly, there seems a remarkable amount of crime which takes place in the area, which could feel as off-putting for a day out as holidaying in Sweden after watching "Nordic Noir" such as "Wallander" or "The Bridge" – are your

summer holidays booked yet? But it is not far from reality, as a read of local newspapers makes it clear that some deeply unpleasant things happen locally from time to time. Sinful behaviour happens all over the place!

Secondly, despite being set in the 1950s, Grantchester has a set of seemingly contemporary issues which it tackles (more noir) such as abuse, cover-ups, and murder! Ultimately the Vicar and the police inspector, Geordie, manage to solve the crimes. The episodes usually end in church, with the Vicar addressing the themes of the episode, not in a preaching way but a very human manner of considering the nature of hope, of seeking peace, of finding love, of healing, of new starts. These are themes that can affect us all.

The actor who plays Geordie has recently provided an interesting appendix to the Runcie books. He has run away with a Vicar's wife, which sounds really heart-breaking for the sad Incumbent. Again, it points out the reality that life brings many challenges, and for all of us to return to God's ways and to seek his presence in times of trouble is the Christian way.

Love, Jo

Saying Goodbye to Ginni

Ginni has blown us away with her blast of fresh air that she has brought to the Hertford Team and All Saints' in particular. After three years as a curate, training for ministerial leadership, Ginni is leaving us to become Vicar of her own group of parishes just beyond Stevenage. We will all miss her

utter groundedness, her sense of humour, her courage and her depth of vision as she has journeyed alongside us in her ministry and personally, I will miss her as a great friend and a marvellous tonic.



We have gained the Easter Journey, a wonderful opportunity to share the meaning of Holy Week and Easter with school children, the fellowship group with its sense of being a learning community and prayer, and our Holy Communion Liturgy for Epiphany. She led our services with such assurance and we learned not to take ourselves too seriously, enjoyed the company of her family and were moved and inspired by the strength and courage Ginni showed by taking Colin's funeral and her amazing support for him while he was so ill.

She rose to every occasion, even though quite often she would tell me it was way beyond her comfort level particularly sermons and became determined to always challenge herself and even joined in the crazy activities of the Sea Cadets as their chaplain.

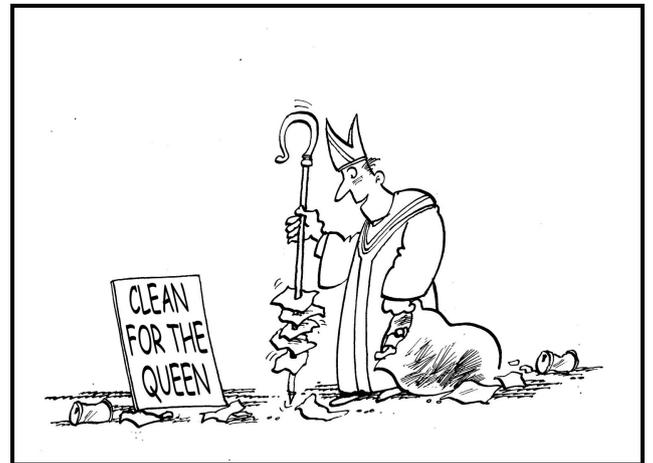
Ginni is a once in a lifetime curate, totally precious and an inspiring example of Christian Ministry, we will always hold a very special place for her at All Saints' and I hope that she will visit us and we will pop in to see her as well!

Irreligion?

We heard recently of a wedding interview in a Registry Office not far from here. The couple were arranging their forthcoming ceremony and asked about readings and music. They were told they could have them but they should not be religious. On asking more about the official stance they were informed that the Registry Office wedding was "anti-religious". This rather surprised the couple who are not religious as such, but not anti.

The view from the Vicarage would be that non-religious – or secular - would have been a more appropriate stance, and that is how it turned out.

Religion tends to have a bad press these days in some circles, and many faithful people tend to dissociate themselves from the word. You can't blame them, there are sometimes actions by supposedly religious people which shock us all, but believing in a force or being which cannot be proven or disproved is generally regarded as a religious stance. We all have our perceptions of reality, and some of us do have a feeling that there is love at the heart of the universe, others seem not to have such an experience.



Love itself, of course, is not verifiable in a scientific sense, so does love exist? Most of us feel love, hopefully most or all of the time, and when we fall in love we feel convinced that love exists. Belief in the God of love is a very similar experience, an awareness of more to the world than meets the scientific – or unscientific – eye.

The very idea of a vow in marriage is a hidden fact between the couple. They have a piece of paper which they sign to show that they are in love and intend to stay together – but the personal contract is basically an invisible one which changes or undergirds the couple's life. So whether in church or a registry office a couple make statements about their love, their hopes and their intentions.

The vows are about their deepest feelings, which even brain scans cannot reveal, so they are ethereal statements which cannot be proven, only lived by. They are essentially religious, it is what the people believe in, what inspires them and gives their life meaning and purpose. Sometimes this is described as touching the heart or the soul, meaning that for any of us it is of ultimate significance.

True faith is surely about love and goodness, and for Christians it is shown supremely in Jesus who is willing to sacrifice himself, to teach us about love of God, neighbour and self. He preaches and offers forgiveness even to those who persecute him and he speaks of going the extra mile, of being humble and while working against evil and wickedness does not condemn those who do wrong but offers them new life. His words and actions reflect God the Father's care for us all, and in our closest relationships we can live fully by being committed to Christ's way of Love, religiously.