

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

20 January 2016: Rev'd John Owen, Vicar of Steep and Froxfield with Privett



Loneliness

"You can't see it, you can't smell it, you can't touch it. You can only feel it when you've got it". That was how Dorothy described loneliness in a recent TV documentary. Isabel, an 18 year old university student, was also lonely. She was finding uni life very different to what she had anticipated. Social media only made her feel more of a failure. An elderly grandmother, with children and grandchildren was interviewed and she wondered how it was that she was lonely and craved a visitor. Seven million people in England and Wales live alone and it's likely that many of us will face loneliness in our own lives.

Small things can help alleviate loneliness. These include listening sympathetically to people's stories and experiences, as well as showing kindness and courtesy. (Even conversations at the cashier's check-out in a supermarket can make a difference to a lonely person.) It's not consumer gifts which bring us happiness but meaningful relationships, where our name is known by others who care about us.

Churches these days are one of a small number of places where people of different ages and outlook meet and socialise after Sunday worship. I remember being told by one person, after a service in which the hand clasp of peace was used, that no one had shaken his hand or acknowledged him since the last Sunday service. That was one of the reasons why he found church a special place. We might think the reason people go to church is that they're religious, but for many it is also because they find companionship and friendship there. Churches are about community, just as God the Trinity is a community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can all contribute to alleviating the epidemic of loneliness.