

Weekly Reflection...

With Paul up to his ears in boxes this week as the Millards make the big move to the vicarage at 100 Acomb Road (a house where we used to have the St Paul's youth club - I caused chaos!), he's asked me to offer this week's reflection.

I want to offer a story of grace actually. A modern-day parable. I'm always on the look out for them to inspire my faith and the faith of others. This is one I shared on Radio Two's Pause For Thought slot this week.

I've been giving thanks to God for a precious friend and former clergy colleague recently. Not long ago she was honoured by Her Majesty the Queen.

Commended for her 'invaluable' contribution to the community.

I was thrilled for Irene.

For years her work amongst Hull's homeless and marginalised had been largely unseen and unrecognised. It's how she liked it.

But even my humble friend confessed to bursting with pride and a smile wider than the Humber Bridge when she received news of the Royal award.

In my time working with Irene I came to see her as a Saint Jude-type character. A champion of lost causes.

I marveled at her absolute belief that no-one was beyond transformation.

Everyone should be given a second chance, she'd tell me.

And then another one.

I lost count of the many broken lives she helped try to heal with practical support and simple, loving friendship.

One afternoon Irene suffered a devastating blow.

She walked out of our church after leading prayers and was carjacked by a young man.

Left sprawled on the pavement beside her walking stick as he sped away.

The traumatic aftermath was the only time I've seen my friend's hopeful spirit dimmed.

And yet after seeing the culprit sentenced in court, she was moved to try and help **even** him.

Making prison visits. Writing letters. Sending gifts.

When he was released, she aided his rehabilitation.

An extraordinary woman of grace, then.

The downside of being around someone like Irene, was the quick realisation that I'm not enough like her.

I suffer compassion fatigue too easily.

Find it hard to forgive sometimes.

Struggle to bounce back from disappointments.

Wonderful works of love, mercy and benevolence are easy to admire in others.

And yet as a Christian I'm still called to put them into action myself - however inadequately.

I know God wants me to be the best Matt possible.

As the Queen's letter to Irene stressed, following the loving example of Jesus is **'a call to service for all of us.'**

Faith or no faith - and in my case, even when it doesn't come naturally.

My abiding memory of Irene is of her serving hot drinks to the homeless with the help of a cheerful young man.

It was the carjacker.

Saint Irene?

She certainly is to me.

Have a great weekend!

Rev Matt Woodcock