

What's your Christian story?



BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

I WAS adopted into a family with an Anglican mother and Methodist father. Towards the end of their lives, they'd look back with a smile on the journey they had made with Christ's people.

It had plenty of ups and downs (not least, as you might imagine, making sense of an adopted child!). For them, Christian life was a shared adventure, not the domain of heroic individuals. However, they spoke in vivid and generous terms of those who had accompanied them in their faith – Christians who had made a difference.

I recall my father sharing how for many years as an apprentice of Jesus, he had only "a sense of duty but none of the joy". Being a Christian was all 'shoulds', 'coulds' and 'musts'. It was in the middle years of their lives that my mother Jean, followed shortly after by my father Peter, encountered (more fully than ever before) the initiative, presence and grace of the Holy Spirit.

This encounter led to a costly vocation in youth ministry, but also to a life marked by the joyful assurance of knowing Christ's presence – not just in the head but in the heart and feet.

It was a deep friendship with an Anglican priest that gave them confidence to explore their faith further. Tom taught them that the Holy Spirit always leads us to

Jesus Christ and seeks to draw us into our Father's concerns and priorities; he invites us to share our Father's heart of love for each one of us and for the whole creation.

For Tom, and for my parents, following Jesus Christ in the company of his people became a joyful and costly journey, a sense of being turned out of themselves into loving service and participation in the life of the Trinity. I realise just how much my own story has been indirectly shaped and influenced by that Christian friend Tom, first my parents' mentor and then for many years, my own.

In the days ahead we will move together as a diocesan community through Ash Wednesday, into the Big Story of Lent, Holy Week and Easter. Once again we will open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit and ask to see ourselves afresh, and our own stories, held and embraced by the story of God's faithful love and compassion in Christ and the Spirit for the world.

I think Christians are people, both beautiful and broken, with two stories to tell: of all that God has done for us in Christ and the Spirit; but also, of all that God has done and is doing for me and for us. May you know yourself seen, known and loved in this holy season with a precious and unique part in God's unfolding story

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