

Unfestive Cone

A few weeks ago, I read a newspaper article about a 51-year-old man who had been made redundant and felt depressed and adrift. He posted his experience on social media and received more than 235,000 messages from people round the world who had fellow-feeling and sent words of encouragement and good wishes. He was reported as feeling uplifted and more positive. This impressed me because so many people had reached out to him without expectation of any return for their effort.

More recently, I was affected more strongly by a more vivid experience. I had driven to a local park with our puppy to give her a run: she runs - I saunter. As I was parking the car on a side road, I mounted the pavement with two wheels to allow a truck coming from the opposite direction to pass between my car and one parked opposite. As I turned the steering wheel and moved forward to get off the pavement, my bumper knocked a mini traffic cone from the edge of the pavement onto the road. The cone rolled under the car, and became jammed between the kerb and the underneath of the car, preventing the wheel from making contact with the road surface. This immobilised the car. It was a courtesy vehicle lent to us by the garage which was repairing ours. I discovered that the boot contained no jack, which I needed to lift the car sufficiently to release the cone. I felt my situation was worse because the car was alongside a parked car, blocking the road to traffic.

I am not the quality of person I would choose to have beside me in a crisis. I could think of no way out but to ring one of our daughters to come to my rescue with a jack; this would take 45 minutes, she thought. It was only a few minutes before a van came along. He stopped having no choice. I explained the problem. He had no jack and he had a schedule to keep to, so he reversed to find another route to his destination.

The next vehicle to come along was another van. Again no jack, but the driver set to with a saw which was in his van and began to cut at the top of the cone. Then he fetched a shovel and delivered hefty blows to dislodge it. I began to fear for the car, which was quite classy and quite new.

Meanwhile, our daughter rang to find out how we were getting on. I could report no progress, as I spotted my "Good Samaritan" disappearing into the trees. He reappeared a few minutes later carrying a large, broken bough. This he held firmly under the wheel which was not in contact with the road. Under instruction, I engaged reverse gear and gently the wheel gripped the branch, which my friend held firm, and remounted the pavement. The cone was released. With a cheery instruction that I should tell the rescue team to stand down, he strode back to his van triumphant.

Judith and I already had been talking about the extraordinary self-sacrifice of the many carers, health workers and others looking after, and keeping safe, the vulnerable and needy over the months as the Covid-19 virus has been causing havoc and distress. There is a deeply ingrained instinct in the human species to freely give support and care to those in need and get personal satisfaction, and even enjoyment, out of doing so.

Working as part of a team to alleviate physical and mental distress is one of the most rewarding experiences in life, as many past and present members and associates of Christ Church and the other churches in the neighbourhood would testify. Over the decades, I have watched with delight the strengthening of a sense of community, often stimulated by initiatives led by the churches in cooperation with housing agencies, council staff, supermarkets and other agencies. Most striking recently is the provision of meals to those in

need. I am confident that this will continue and strengthen in the difficult time of recovery from the effects of the virus.

We are entering the season of Advent and Christmas, when Christians celebrate God's amazing grace by remembering the gift to the world of His Son. May we feel His love in sharing with family and friends the joy of togetherness.

Robert Lock