

# **Sermon on Sunday 21 June 2026**

## **by Rev. Alan Stewart**

*Readings: Psalm 133 & John 15. 9-17*



### **A divine connection**

Well, the much-anticipated *Toy Story 5* has finally hit our cinema screens and I for one can't wait. In it, the toys face a new threat; technology. All summer, they've been working on helping Bonnie, their human, make friends. But now the only friend Bonnie wants is Lilyypad; her device.

Screens have taken over our lives. Whatever we think of the new government social media ban for under 16s, we can probably all sympathize with the intentions behind it.

We live in a world where we can connect with people, places, information and ideas in seconds. So, why do we often feel so disconnected?

Many believe that this is the loneliest time in human history.

One of the most urgent insightful commentaries on these times comes in the six-part Channel 4 drama written by Russell T Davies called *Tip Toe*. It's an uncomfortable but essential watch.

One of the main characters is Clive, played brilliantly by David Morrissey. He's an out-of-work electrician in a loveless marriage, who worries about his grown-up kids and their place in the world. His biggest fear is that he isn't relevant. The promise that if he worked hard and voted for the right things hasn't delivered. So, he's frustrated and angry and looking to blame. His pride won't allow him to ask for help, so he's vulnerable to conspiracy theories and radicalization which dehumanizes people not like you. His next-door neighbour, Leo, is a single gay man, and an unfortunate series of sliding door moments leads in the end to tragedy.

And yet, there are moments when these two men find common ground in their humanity, their shared story; moments when if they had just been a little bit more vulnerable with one another, reached out with some empathy, they could have been friends and the tragedy could have been averted.

Disconnection breeds blame.

We've seen this on the streets of Belfast in the violence and the rioting. But we've also seen a wider community connect and unite in defiance of that. There is so much more that unites us, than divides.

The author and podcaster Brené Brown says, 'Connection is the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard and valued.'

I believe the best way to make that happen, actually, is by nurturing a connection with something bigger, something beyond; with the divine, with what some people call God.

Why? Well, because connecting with the divine changes first how we see ourselves, and then how we see others.

You see, God tells us that we are sacred, holy, loved and created for a purpose. And if *we* are, then we *all* are. We belong to God and we belong to each another; interconnected; one human family where each member is as important and valued as the next. In Jesus' words, we are part of the same vine. The same god-energy runs through us all.

The opposite of belonging, you'll have heard me say, is fitting in. Feeling like we have to conform, or change or be like someone else, isn't belonging. Belonging is about being accepted exactly as we are. And that path starts by learning to accept and love and

treasure ourselves. And when we learn that, we begin to see others through that same lens.

And of all places, church should be that place where this can happen, where shame and phobia are healed within that love that Jesus commanded.

Apparently, Christianity is back in fashion. I'm not talking about those who would use it to cause division or scapegoat Islam. Among Gen Z in particular, interest in spirituality and religion is growing. But why?

Well, I guess it might have something to do with this human hunger to connect in a disconnected world; this need to belong in this polarized world, to have something to believe in, to make meaning in all this meaninglessness.

But taking that step towards a faith community can be daunting and scary. And that's why I am so thankful, actually, for technology.

You may or may not be aware but we have our very own Zoom Church. In fact, yesterday was its fifth anniversary! For those who don't know, it's a regular and faithful community that meet online most Sundays at 10.30am, to worship and pray and create community across cyberspace. And it's a lifeline for many, especially those who can't get to a building or prefer to worship from home; those housebound or on holiday. And people from all

over the world have found their way to a welcome there. It's especially non-threatening for those who just want to dip their toe in the waters of church without any commitment, because you can just rock up, keep your camera off and listen.

So, although technology can be a curse, it can also connect us to God and to one another, in our disconnected world.

If you want to explore your questions, check out our [Exploring Faith](#) course which starts on Saturday mornings from 4<sup>th</sup> July for six weeks.

If you want to connect more with God, try praying. And, of course, there's no wrong way to pray. If it comes from the heart, it's always right.

If you weren't able to come along to the 'How to Talk to God' sessions over the past few weeks, technology again to the rescue! You can listen in on the [St Andrew's website](#).

Let's end with a prayer:

'Spirit of Life,

In a world defined by constant noise and endless screens, we pause to breathe. We acknowledge the heavy weight of isolation that so easily creeps in despite all the ways we are meant to be connected.

Forgive us for the times we allow superficial scrolling to replace the warmth of true presence, and heal the spaces within us that feel unseen, unheard, or unknown.

Ground us in this very moment. Open our eyes to the people right in front of us, and grant us the courage to lower our walls. Give us the grace to listen with an empathetic heart, to speak with kindness, and to reach out to those who are hurting.

Remind us that we were created for community. Help us to be a bridge of understanding, a safe harbour for others, and a living reminder that no one is ever truly alone.

May our connections be rooted in love, and may our presence bring light to a disconnected world.'

Amen.