

Our true guide as we seek God's treasures

For my birthday I was given a new gadget. It's a handheld GPS device which can tell you where you are on the earth's surface to within a few feet and inches. Extraordinary!

Well, I read the 'quick start guide' for my new personal navigator. Seemed to make sense. Then I loaded the owner's manual onto my computer. Yet more information. Slightly more confusing than the quick start guide. Then I took the gizmo into the garden, powered it up and watched as it positioned itself with any number of unseen satellites zipping around our skies.

After a minute or so it burst into life. Standing under the blue atlas cedar, it told me I was exactly 679ft above sea level. And what's more, I was precisely 52 degrees 18.481 North and 001 degrees 59.441 West. Excellent!

But to be perfectly honest, I was now stuck. No amount of reading the quick start manual or the owner's manual could help me with the next bit. I needed someone to show me how to use it properly. So I asked Derek Latham. Really, all of this was Derek's fault anyway!

It was in April, on the parish ramble near Wychbold, that Derek showed Joseph and I the joys and frustrations of one of his and Delia's hobbies - geocaching. Many of you who have enjoyed their rambles over the years will know something about it. Cutting through undergrowth, searching on hands and knees around fallen tree trunks or under bridges, some of you will have had first hand experience of searching for and finding (sometimes) the caches of treasure dotted around our countryside.

Each cache has a specific co-ordinate. There are 847,433 of them to track down around the world! Each of them is logged on a website. And by entering the co-ordinates into your GPS you can then start to track the caches down. By the time you read this, we hope to have begun our treasure hunting on holiday in the Scilly Isles - where, at the last count, there were 19 known caches. In life - as with this little example - there are three stages of learning.

First stage - read the instructions.

Second stage - watch and learn from someone else as they follow the instructions.

Third stage - do it yourself!

You might add a fourth stage - review, learn from your mistakes, ask further advice to fine-tune your practice and try again.

There is no substitute for experience. The same can be said of our lives as Christians.

It was a joy and a real privilege to walk with Alistair, Caroline, Christine, Jennie, Lydia and Mandy through a confirmation course. We read a confirmation book together (stage 1). We learned from each other (stage 2). We talked about God, prayer, worship, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, Holy Communion, Jesus' life and ministry and what the confirmation service would be like. But things really came alive as we talked and shared and learned from each other from our own experiences. After the confirmation service (stage 3) it was good to hear from five of them about what the confirmation service had meant to them (we look forward to sharing with Jennie her experience on September 13th when she is confirmed)

In the autumn, I am encouraging as many of the church community as possible to think about joining a home group. At their very best, home groups are places of growth and support and inclusivity. They can be places where we find we are loved and accepted and challenged in our discipleship as we go out into our worlds of work and home and neighbourliness. At their worst, they can become exclusive, holy huddles or cliques doing no-one any good at all. Hopefully, we will be working towards being the former and not the latter!

Home groups can help us find our co-ordinates in the landscape of Christian discipleship. Just as a GPS system needs several satellites to help calculate the user's true position on the planet, so it is that each home group member can help the others find their grounding in God's world and God's word.

Ultimately, our true guiding light, our true positioning satellite, is Christ. I have always found this verse of Scripture to be true and entirely dependable:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him
and he shall direct your paths.*

Paul

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