



From a service led by the Evangelism and Service group on 30th July 2023

Readings: Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52; Romans 8: 24-28, 38-39

Jess Uden – Sharing together



In the first story of the three that were read to us, the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13: 31-32), we hear that the kingdom of God is like a rather small seed, that it is sown in a field, and grows...and grows...and grows...into a big tree that birds nest in.

Now some of the work of the group who are leading the service today, the Evangelism and Service group, is about sowing small seeds to enable the work of the kingdom of God to grow here, at Downing Place United Reformed Church.

One way we sow these seeds is by working alongside groups and charities to enable them to support people in Cambridge. Often it is about giving them a space, like the mustard tree gave to the birds.

One of the first groups we started talking with when we moved back into this redeveloped church, was [Connected Lives Cambridgeshire](#).

They walk alongside families, of all different types, helping them grow and thrive. Just like that seed that grew into a big tree. Amongst other things, they use some of our rooms here, including the Junior Church room, to run groups, supporting people in doing the best for everyone in their family.



When I was recently having a conversation with Helen, the Director of the Connected Lives Cambridgeshire Hub, and Sonya, one of their volunteers, (two people who are now a real part of the community here), they reflected to me that they see Downing Place URC, and the support that we give them, as 'hands, hospitality, and home'.



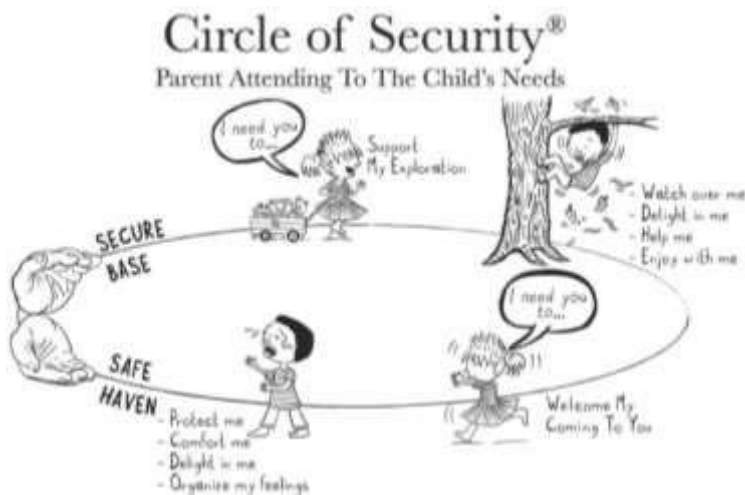
'Hands' to support, encourage, and embrace.



'Hospitality' in giving them a friendly welcome,



and 'Home' as a place to be themselves, a place to work from, and place for all involved to feel supported, and cared for.



In their work, Connected Lives often talk about something called the 'Circle of Security'; which is a little like the mustard tree for those birds. Somewhere they can nest; where they can be themselves, where they can think and grow. Then they then go out into the world, soaring in their own ways elsewhere, before coming back the tree for more to hospitality and care. According to Helen and Sonya, we are like that tree to Connected Lives.

This takes us back to the mustard seed story, that talks of something small, that grew into something big, that spread its arms to support other living things.

Just as Connected Lives works with families to help them thrive and grow, giving them a safe haven and secure base. Downing Place has slowly but surely started to enable groups and organisations know they have a space that will support, nourish, and walk alongside them in their work.

It's not always fast growing, it's not always easy, it's not perfect, but with God's help, we shall continue exploring how best to enable the Kingdom of God to be here, in the centre of Cambridge.



Stephen Thornton – Hub Hospitality

On the night on which he was betrayed, Jesus, sent his disciples a memo. Er...no!

On the night on which He was betrayed, Jesus called them all to a meeting. Er....no!

On the night on which He was betrayed, Jesus invited his disciples to join him around his table for a simple meal. Yes: and that's why we celebrate that meal in symbolic form twice a month here at Downing Place Church. We call it Holy Communion.

Communion: "the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on a mental or spiritual level", so says Wikipedia.

When the Building Group was working with our architects to determine what we wanted our new building to look like they insisted that there would be an area, right at the heart of the building where such "communion" could take place. A light, airy, warm, welcoming space that drew people in and provided an ambiance that would encourage mingling and conversation. We call that 'The Hub'.

But a building, however, beautifully designed, is, of course, not sufficient. Only when we started our Hub Hospitality initiative was there the prospect of true communion and thanks to the 20 of you who volunteer, on Wednesdays initially and now on Thursdays as well, true communion is taking place.

Crafted initially around the Wednesday lunchtime concerts that are now so well attended, post-covid, and now also around the weekday services and Knit One Give One on Thursdays, we encourage people to come early or stay on afterwards for free coffee, tea and biscuits. That's all. Nothing more nothing less.

The results have been remarkable. Not only do we see more church members and friends using the building during the week, we witness other users of the building enjoying our modest hospitality and

engaging in shared conversation. Groups of people are actively arranging to meet each other in the Hub. For instance, a friendship group has developed, drawn from a wide range of countries, Scotland, England, Greece, China, Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan. They look forward to their time in The Hub each week, enjoying the lunchtime concert and then catching up in the Hub afterwards. They have grown in number over the last year or so and support each other in many different ways. They describe themselves as 'humans united here, together, by your Hub'.

Meanwhile, we have two people who regularly work from the Hub on their laptops, instead of working from home. Others who work elsewhere in the City pop in to use the Hub in a similar way in between meetings, or to break up time sat at home working on their own.

Members of group activities that are held in the church often meet and chat in the Hub before and after their sessions and the leaders of these groups sometimes use the Hub, or in the nice weather, the garden, to have meetings.

The Downing Place style of evangelism is not to engage directly in conversation about faith unless people deliberately ask or to hand out Bible tracts. Instead, it is simply to reveal ourselves as friendly, approachable people, willing and able to listen and offer signposting to where people can get practical help if they need it. It is to show that unlike other institutions and even other churches, we are a safe space where you will not be categorised and judged for your beliefs, your sexuality, your gender, your race, or your social class but where you can always find someone to talk to. So, if you haven't yet experienced Hub Hospitality, give it a try and just come as you are. You will receive a warm welcome. Oh, and you can always bring your own sandwiches!

Helen Christy – On the Street

I don't know how many of you frequent Cambridge on a Saturday evening between ten o'clock in the evening to three o'clock in the morning.

It is a very different Cambridge to the one we all saw on our way to church this morning.

Mostly 20 to 30 year olds are seen queuing to get into clubs, including Revolution next to our church. Or conversely people who have no home to sleep that night are bedding themselves down under blankets.

Generally there is an air of people meeting, socialising and wanting to enjoy their evening out together with friends. Some people have chosen to wear shoes which are practically impossible to walk in and some in desperation retreat to walking in bare feet holding their shoes in their hands. There are always a large number of abandoned glass bottles on the pavements and some get broken leaving splintered glass on the streets.

Security guards and sometimes the club and pub managers can be seen standing outside every night club and pub, along with a few police walking around.

Most people are dancing and drinking inside the clubs which can hold up to 700 people.

Unknown to most of them there is a caring and thoughtful process of walkie talkie communication between the security guards, CCTV operatives, police and ambulance, doing their best to ensure that people have an enjoyable and safe evening.

So how does Downing Place and some of its members fit into this scenario? What has it got to do with us and our Christian witness in our town?

In this room on the other side of the folding doors, last night and most Saturday nights between 10pm and 3am we hold NightLite. NightLite consists of 4 volunteers, either from this church or other churches in Cambridge. We set up tables and chairs, mats for people to recover on, with a screen to give them privacy. We have large supplies of flip flops, sick bowls, hair ties, blankets, basic first aid, tea and coffee, snacks and bottles of water. We are open to receive those people are not having a good

evening for a whole variety of reasons. Their drink has been spiked, they have drunk more than their body can handle, they know they will be sleeping in the car park that evening but they want someone to come and talk to first, they have heard that we have a supply of flip flops for their aching feet. They have lost the friends they came with and can't manage on their own. Sometimes a whole entourage of friends come in with their friend who is the worse for ware, grateful to have somewhere to help their friend recover.

People generally comment on how touched they are that a church is opening its doors in this way and volunteers are giving up their time at this hour to be there for them. Both Janet and I have heard people exclaim how amazed they are that they are in a church.

We can offer tender loving care, an opportunity to be ill in a safe space maybe sleeping off the effects of drink, finding them a safe way to get home, maybe a listening ear for people living alone and know we are there for them, a safe haven for vulnerable people who have met with a threatening experience on the streets, a person who does not want to spend the night clubbing with their friends and just wants somewhere else to come and talk. The list goes on and on.

Street Pastors is linked to NightLite, 4 volunteers again either from this church or other churches who walk around the streets of Cambridge. They have supportive and meaningful conversations with both the young people and the staff of the various evening venues. Practically they pick up any glass bottle they see, sweep up any broken glass, give out flip flops and water. They bring people to NightLite for rest and recuperation. This is particularly useful on the cold nights of winter. Street Pastors also come and use Downing Place for a much-needed break.

NightLite and Street Pastors are part of the walkie talkie system with the clubs and emergency services and often get called to a particular situation where our services of people centred, caring are considered the most effective approach. Revolution next door often bring someone who they feel requires our services to NightLite. If our own security guard does not turn up for any reason they are quick to offer their own services just so we can stay open.

We are told that we are really appreciated and respected by the police, clubs, pubs and ambulance services. It is recognised that we reduce costs for many of the emergency services by being there to act in a productive but sympathetic, time demanding, less legalistic manner.

The question we get asked is why do you want to do this ?

If you are interested in learning more do let me know