

Faith in Narnia – is it always winter but never Christmas in dementia?

A highlight of my Christmas was attending Carols by Candlelight at St Margaret's Church Rochester on 12 December. In aid of the Alzheimer's Society, one of the organisers of the event was John Portman who is the charity's volunteer representative in Medway, a member of St Margaret's Church and on my project steering group. We thoroughly enjoyed the mulled wine and mince pies, excellent readings and uplifting musical contributions, and my good friend Keith Oliver spoke as Alzheimer's Society ambassador, reflecting on his life with dementia.

The title of Keith's talk was The Lion, The Sun and The Christmas Card. He shared memories of Christmas in the primary schools where he taught and was head teacher, telling us that his favourite book to read with children was C S Lewis's The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. He said for some people with dementia the world is sadly a place like Narnia, where it is always winter but never Christmas, but that this need not be the case. Recently he returned to the novel and, with the help of a friend who is a local Baptist minister, saw it in a new light, understanding the allegory of Jesus as Aslan the lion for the first time. He said *'Often the perception is that people with dementia are not able to learn new things or to take on new activities. With sensitive support this is clearly wrong. I have experienced this first hand and seen it many times for others. Also one undoubted consequence of having dementia is that one's physical world DOES shrink and to have this extension of my spiritual world has really helped me to live as well as possible this year.'*

Thank you, Keith! I could not have had a more eloquent or compelling call to work with colleagues across the Diocese in 2016 to expand the spiritual world of people living with dementia and their carers. While acknowledging the chill of winter in dementia, perhaps we can also bring some Summer warmth and sunshine!