

Dear Friends,

Last week I had the joy of going to see the film 'The Essex Ways.' It was a real pleasure to be with people and then for there to be a Q&A session afterwards with James, the star of the film, and Tom (our own Circuit Steward, Judith's son) who directed and edited the film. The film is about walking the Essex Ways over 21 days and 400km. It began with the 'official' Essex Way walk from Epping to Harwich and then continued down the coastline to Tilbury and included a trip to Mersea Island along the way too. The diversity of landscape, geography and sense of place was a main feature in a film that was trying to show there are many facets and dimensions to the county.

What became clear through the film and subsequent conversation was the importance of identity. James is a storyteller and he had been collecting many stories of local people along the way and thereby collecting the local history. This has left me pondering how our identity is shaped by the people and place in which we are.

As James travelled through the different parts of Essex, from the deep rural to towns and villages, and everything in between, he met people who had a strong sense of being rooted in the place in which they were living. Sometimes this was linked to family roots and many generations having lived there before. For some, living in Colchester will have been the place called 'home' for most, if not all, of life. For others of us, it is a place we call home in this season.

Wherever we are, God in Jesus is with us. Jesus is the person in whom we can rest and through whom we will always find our home and identity. The more time we spend with Jesus the more like him we will become. We will be shaped by the goodness, care and compassion which comes only from him. We will experience once again what it means for all who turn to him to experience the eternal life which comes through his death and resurrection. This then shines through to others.

To find our identity in Christ, is to know that our security, worth and purpose come through God's grace and compassion. It is to know that we are children of God, loved and cared for. We then work out this sense of identity in the place in which we live, whether that be urban, suburban, rural or island. The physical landscape may change, but our identity in Christ doesn't, as we have the stability which comes only through God.

As we move into a new Connexional and academic year, and from summer to autumn, it can be a period of marking the passing of one time to another which can include different changes along the way. Let's remember the stability that comes through being close to Jesus and in knowing that our identity in him will remain forever constant, whatever the changes of life and place may put before us.

God bless,
Chris