

Dear friends, come on a journey back through time with me. It's June 1989, the sun is shining and the air is warm. Life is good. We are sitting on a wall outside a house located in Laura Place, Aberystwyth. We are waiting for another student to appear – a student who wants to help us with edit a magazine that we have in preparation.

Calmly, an Alfa Romeo car turns into Laura Place. The radio is on but what's surprising is that the music flowing out through the open windows of the car is opera. The car parks and out of the car a snappily dressed guy gets out of the car and walks towards us. Is this the student you are waiting for? Surely not! He comes closer and greets you – "Siôn?" "Yes" – you reply. "Hello – I'm Lloyd, Lloyd Jones!" and that was the first time I met Lloyd. We spent the weekend in the cellar of the house at Laura Place working on *Yr Efrogdydd* magazine which was being published under the auspices of the SCM – the Student Christian Movement – which I was doing quite a bit with at the time nationally in Wales but more widely also at a British level.

It was to be a quarter of a century or perhaps even more before Lloyd and my paths crossed again – surprising in a way given the nature of Welsh speaking Wales, but by then I was working for the BBC Trust and had been running an outreach event with audiences in Eifionydd and Llŷn. It was mid-afternoon and we were on our way back to Valley to catch the flight home to Cardiff and with a couple hours spare we as a team called in here – to St Beuno's Church – to see one of the wonders of medieval Wales. There Lloyd, who was by then rector of Clynnog Fawr, was about to hold a service and we had a lovely chat, with the quarter of a century that had passed since we had last seen each other of no significance! Lloyd was just such a person in my experience – someone who made friends for life, who embodied the building of connections and bridging between Wales' different Christian traditions and denominations. And that's perhaps why it's fitting that the title I chose for tonight's session was "Climbing the second mountain: the future for ecumenism for Wales?" especially as I understood from Casi that Lloyd had a particular fondness for mountains. And I must say at the outset what a privilege it is to deliver this lecture in memory of Lloyd – so many thanks to Casi for the invitation and to Rosie for taking on all the arrangements and making the first contact.

But what do I really mean with that title? As you know I have been in the position of Chief Executive of Cytûn since the beginning of April – so about 4 months – and thinking about this lecture I had to decide the boundaries, which

are what to include and what to omit. And of course, that's also the nature of ecumenism – it can be incredibly broad for some and extremely narrow for others. So the conclusion I came to is that the material I would refer to would be what has crossed my desk since I took office. In other words, the things I've heard, the conversations I've had and the material I've read since early April. Let me say - before going a step further - that some of you who are sitting in front of me will soon be gnashing your teeth and thinking 'why didn't he mention this or that?' My response to that will be to agree with you and say bluntly that what we're going to have this evening is an overview, based on my own personal impressions, with the goal of starting a wider discussion, and to help us all to consider what future ecumenism has in Wales, and - if there is a future - what the nature of that ecumenism will be. Ultimately the member denominations of Cytûn, through the Trustees they nominate, have the responsibility of setting the future direction of Cytûn, and doing so through dialogue with our church leaders. To that end I have convened a joint meeting between the Trustees and the leaders of the denominations in October and I look forward to seeing the outcomes and outputs of that discussion in due course.

A few years after I met Lloyd, I started my career in Communication – as Plaid Cymru's first ever press officer. Those were exciting and admittedly very satisfying days, but it became clear from the outset fairly that there were some absolutely key questions in communications. Those questions in English are "who what why when where and how?" – "Who, what, why, when, where and how" If a news story or press release doesn't answer those questions, then it's a failure, and in all seriousness those questions are key for all of us as we consider most situations. For us now the key questions are probably "who what and why" because if we can find an answer to those, then the "when, where and how" - when where and how - is a bit easier to answer.

So let's go back to basics and ask who and what Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales is and why it exists, before we turn to other considerations relating to these three questions.

For any charity, the essentials of that charity are to be found in its constitution, and the constitution of Cytûn says its key purpose is "to unite in pilgrimage those churches in Wales which, acknowledging the revelation of God in Christ, confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is our God and our savior in accordance with the scriptures; and, in obedience to God's will and in the power of the Holy

Spirit, commit themselves to seeking to deepen their communion with Christ and with each other in the Church, which is the body of Christ, and to realize their mission to announce the Gospel by testifying and serving the world collectively, for the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The constitution goes on to say that the Agreed Mission Statement is as follows:

1. Encouraging the Churches to grow in the unity that Christ gives and wills for his Church 'for the world to believe'
2. Affirming and demonstrating the central place of worship and prayer in all tasks undertaken
3. Enabling the churches to face together the issues that divide them so that they can grow to have a fuller understanding of nature, purpose and unity in the Church of Christ
4. Encouraging the churches to undertake together initiatives in the fields of evangelism and mission
5. Enabling the churches to respond together to needs within the human community, both in the islands and abroad, by sharing those resources provided by God
6. To enable the churches to initiate dialogue with the secular authorities and other world Religions on relevant issues
7. Assist the churches to come to a common view and decide things collectively
8. Continue to perform such acts as are deemed suitable from the point of view of the member of the Charity churches

In all these matters the Charity will focus mainly on the public and ecclesiastical issues requiring the joint resources, reflection and action of all churches, keeping in mind European and global perspectives."

So – to move on to the next question – why, why is this important? To answer that question I'd like to refer to some five or six addresses I've heard over the last few months – four of which were delivered during the CEC general communion – the Conference of European Churches – held in Tallinn, Estonia back in mid-June.

But before doing so I think it's worth it to ask the provocative question "Why bother?" and this isn't an entirely stupid question. After all from looking at the statistics of religion and belief in the 2021 census you could interpret the situation as quite dire. As an article which appeared in several newspapers in May 2022 notes, citing the fruits of Dr John Hayward's research, which in turn

built on the foundation of Peter Brierley's long-term statistical work, things are very much on a downward trend. In a number of articles that appeared in the press in May 2022, Hayward used the concept of the 'R' number – which became known to us all in the context of infection rates during the Covid-19 pandemic. You will remember that this R number gives us some approximation of the speed of infection in our communities. Using the same concept Hayward concluded that many of the traditional denominations in Wales will be extinct within the next twenty to thirty years. This of course came before the 2021 census figures were published but the downward trend was also evident there, with the percentage of the population calling themselves Christians down from 57.6% in 2011 to 43.6% in 2021. Of course, all we who serve within different Welsh denominations have seen this to some extent as we have seen the numbers attending services fall, and the average age of attendees generally getting older. But the denominations disappear completely? It's worth you looking over Cytûn's Easter 2023 policy bulletin – which is the fruit of research and thought by my colleague and friend the Rev Gethin Rhys, Cytûn's Policy officer. In his discussion of the figures, Gethin says that we should not give undue weight to this change in percentages over the decade, as "our experience as churches shows that many of the 57.6% who so replied in 2011 did not adhere to the religious practices of Christianity, even occasionally. Expressions of cultural legacy or a sense of identity was the reason for this answer for many; for others it would indicate perhaps their desire for a Christian funeral at the end of their life." Gethin also notes that "Perhaps the opportunity in this Census for the first time to identify their sense of nationality contributed to the loss of those who used the Christian box in that way in the past." Gethin concludes that "the 2021 numbers are more realistic than before in terms of the numbers that have a practical affiliation of and kind with Christianity, or a desire to engage with Christianity through social media or religious broadcast coverage. There is room to believe that this is already the case with the other religions listed". Gethin also notes that there is considerable variation from area to area, and thirdly he also refers to research that the think tank Theos conducted and published on those who identified in the census as having no religion. That research by Theos broadly shows that those who identified as having no religion can be divided into three cohorts – the 'campaigning nones', the 'tolerant nones' and the 'spiritual nones' with the latter here among the most interesting as they often demonstrate a range of spiritual beliefs and practices, such as prayer, retreat, meditation etc. It should

also be noted that 6.3% failed to answer this voluntary question regarding religious affiliation. The fact is – again as Gethin points out – that the "Census is a useful tool in understanding the population of Wales... but the results will raise more questions than they will answer!"

Interestingly, this was the topic Archbishop Andrew John of the Church in Wales chose to speak on when he addressed the Senedd's cross-party group on religion in June, and it was a very interesting address. In his presentation the Archbishop acknowledged – as Gethin does – that the census results raise more questions than answers but his conclusion was that there had been a change in the nation's religious affiliation and suggested several reasons for this. The first of these is the growth in secularism and that this is to an extent due to the change of emphasis due to the relative improvement of the population to be more affluent, so the emphasis now is "Material Welfare" with people managing to live day to day without God. He also suggested that we live in a postmodern time, and that there is now big competition on a Sunday and that this has been a challenge for all sorts of organisations and not just the Churches. Relativism – with our belief on some kind of spectrum rather than absolute belief. There is also encouragement in this diversity, as well as opportunity – with the Archbishop suggesting that our church buildings represent opportunities as well as challenges, and that the example given by believers who live a holy life, who put others first, encourage the faith – "planet we and not just planet me". And then the movement that has developed towards having experiences – more than ever before people want experiences, and there's a real opportunity in that because people still have an attachment to values and aspire to something beyond just the material. There is therefore a real opportunity for us as churches to offer an authentic spiritual experience to those who seek it, and that is more important to the majority than presenting the faith in an intellectual way.

What Archbishop Andy said towards the end of June echoed quite a few of the four keynote speeches I had heard a few days earlier during the CEC General Assembly – the Conference of European Churches, which was meeting in Tallinn, Estonia from 15-20 June. And the reason I refer to those speeches is that there are obvious lessons for us here in Wales from the speeches heard – and perhaps the most obvious lesson of all is the importance of expanding rather than shrinking our horizons, even as the numbers attending our churches dwindle, as we have so much in common with, and to learn from, what is happening in other parts of Europe and indeed the rest of the world.

The first keynote speaker was Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who was the leader of the opposition in Belarus after her husband, Siarheu, who had previously been leader, was arrested by Belarusian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko. She spoke glowingly about the situation in Belarus following the peaceful uprising that took place there in 2020 which had appeared successful for the first few days, before Lukashenko the dictator responded to the peaceful protests with deadly violence that has lasted ever since, with some 4,000 opponents jailed since 2020 on ludicrous charges – such as wearing clothes of the 'wrong' colour. Yet her vision of Christianity's place in opposing that violence was crystal clear – defeating evil only with goodness. She also warns that violent *regimes* always try to control faith representatives because they are afraid of their primary allegiance to God rather than worldly power, and therefore try to oppress them, try to buy their silence by giving them privileges or favours, and of course they often succeed – and it was perhaps no surprise to hear her being critical of the Patriarch Kirill in Moscow, and his response to Russian attacks on Ukraine. But Sviatlana was clear that war could not be won without also winning the peace - that violence must be resisted - and that Christianity and the Christian churches have a key place in unleashing the deceptions, lies and violence of governments across Europe and doing so by standing up for the truth, by standing clearly for brotherhood and sisterhood and love in the true sense of the word - in whatever way possible - including prayer.

The great message of the German academic and sociologist Hartmut Rosa was the importance of finding balance and resonance in our lives. He sees that we have now reached a position as a European society of having to run to stand still, and that our lives need to be re-prioritised in order to move on from the emphasis on limitless growth and instead re-discover the place of relationships with each other. I wonder if there are lessons for us as churches in Wales in this regard as well. Has there been too much emphasis on growth, have we lost the ability to recognise the other things we should be contributing to society, and have we too been swallowed up by the lie that success can only be demonstrated through growth? As Rosa said, one of the glaring weaknesses of our society now is that it doesn't have a heart that listens – "this society massively lacks a listening heart" – and there's room for churches to provide that if they can move beyond just pronouncing on, and protecting truths which is what Rosa says causes a hard heart. Is there room for resonance in our interactions with each other as we look to the future of ecumenism in Wales? Do we have a heart that listens, as we relate to each other? And can this

resonance lead to the birth of something new? When I speak to ministers and church workers the lack of *resonance* in their lives is clear. Surely, we too, have now reached a position of running to stand still and must recognize that this is not the way to realise the Kingdom of God. It's all about relationships and according to Rosa "religion derives its great power, namely from the fact that it makes a kind of vertical promise of resonance, that it says: the silent, cold, hostile or indifferent universe is not at the basis of my existence, but a response relationship ... 'I have called you by your name, you are mine'". Let's remember that.

But of course, there's also a danger in ecumenism – you only have to remember Father Ted's popular comedy TV series. When anything was difficult or complicated then "that would be an ecumenical matter" would be the inevitable words of the Craggy Island clergy. That was also the warning of the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch, Bartholomew who warned against being fascinated by what he calls "new ecumenism". This is a movement that he defined as threatening to bring together a range of beliefs – consistent, in their view, with Christianity - by the 'family values' fundamentalists. After 4 years of Trump in the White House it is hardly necessary to make this point, but as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya emphasized, the phrase 'when the sensible lose it, they lose it big time' can be especially true of church leaders who are seduced and fascinated by the attractions of this world – and especially so in relation to power and influence.

But I'd also like to refer to two other speeches I heard recently – which had quite similar themes to each other. The first was the speech of former Archbishop of Wales, Rowan Williams at the CEC general gymnasium in Tallinn, and the second was the special speech of Professor Anthony Reddie, Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, Mansfield College, Oxford, at the General Meeting of Welsh Independents in Rhosllanerchrugog at the end of June. Anthony was speaking at the invitation of the new President of the Independent, the Rev. Jeff Williams. But Rowan Williams' speech came first.

The Archbishop began his speech by asking what it means to be blessed – referring to the Sermon on the Mount in particular. He says blessed people – fortunate people – are those who are not addicted or prisoners to their own stories, who can avoid increasing the resources they have and instead acknowledge their dependence on God's gifts and on his mercy. And this is true for churches and for organisations too – including the ecumenical movement in

Wales. It recognises that we all have stories about ourselves and that there is nothing wrong with that, but that we can become addicted to those stories, if they contribute disproportionately to our status and to our identity. In the words of +Rowan "there are some stories that become so compulsive we have a kind of addictive relation, almost, to a picture of how we work and who we are. And so we build up and we reinforce all those things that give us a sense of worth and virtue." He goes on to stress that this is contrary to the Christian narrative which says we do NOT need to earn our own worth – we don't need to reach some level of goodness before God loves us. God's story is clear – he loves us anyway and this can be found in the Bible throughout such as in the book of Deuteronomy where Moses says to the people of Israel – "do you think God chose you because you are so impressive? No, God has chosen you because he has chosen you". And the same in the New Testament – and especially the story of the last supper where Jesus tells his disciples "I know you're all going to let me down. This is my body and my blood to feed you, because I'm not going anywhere – I'll be with you to the end of the age" and this is reinforced by the Resurrection where God the Father says the same thing – "I'm going nowhere, the Son is going nowhere, and the Holy Spirit isn't going anywhere. We're here. We're here with you." In other words, we are all called to be part of a community where we NEVER need to prove our worth and also where the numbers in our churches, and our success doesn't matter – where our essence comes from the fact that God loves us. Sounds like Hartmut Rosa's 'resonance'? And the point is that it is through worship that we are always drawn back to the heart of that story, reminded of what we are, and what we are not. We don't need to be perfect. We don't need to be god – we need to be human beings and to be open to God's providence. To quote Rowan's speech again - and this is the real message to us as an ecumenical movement and churches - "We have to learn that our worth does not have to be created by our effort, and that our identity does not consist in what we can make and preserve for ourselves or in the conviction of our innocence and goodness. The story we now tell is of another kind of shared identity, in which a community finds its solidity in the knowledge that each one is faithfully present for the sake of all others; where mutual assurance of our attention and acceptance creates a foundation for trust. And the cornerstone of this is simply the recognition that this community exists in a state of 'blessing', alignment with the act of God, whose love is not apportioned as a reward". That is the good news – that God loves us as we are, that the life of the Spirit is in us. And that

life draws us back to those words that were at the heart of +Rowan's speech of "pleading" and "dreaming". In our prayers we plead to God for the world. We plead to God to open the world to his purpose and to his love in new ways. But we also need to dream with that dream that says 'things don't need to be this way'. We can live in a different way. It is a matter – for me to reiterate the point – of freeing ourselves from our own stories that captivate us, and instead to set ourselves up to be part of God's story. And please visit the front page of the Cytûn website – www.cytun.cymru to see the interview that +Rowan recorded with me in Tallinn.

Anthony Reddie also makes a similar point in the speech he gave at the Annibynwyr Cymraeg's annual meeting in Rhosllanerchrugog back at the end of June. Anthony Reddie told a series of stories, and of course is in a highly honourable lineage in this regard given Jesus' propensity to tell parables. His initial question was 'what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in changing times and in a changing context?'. He talked about how we all walk around with an imaginary rucksack with us carrying those treasures that are important to us and of course the treasures in the rucksack change over time. So to give you a personal example, forty years ago my imaginary rucksack would have included a camera. Now – and I still really enjoy making photographs – the space that the camera would have once taken, has now been replaced by Cath my wife, and the children – they are now my treasure, and of course this process is important. As Anthony says, if you can't leave things behind, then this results in fundamentalism. But of course, if we just let things go in order to put the latest fad or gimmick in our rucksack, then we'll lose important things too along the way. And it's also important for us to remember that the things of the past are not necessarily better than those of the future. There is an ongoing tension – as +Rowan also pointed out – between the "root" and the "route" – as Anthony described it.

And, yet as Anthony said, there is also no danger of us beginning to define ourselves on the basis of what **we are not** and that is what has happened to an impressive degree in our politics here in Britain over the last decade. There has been serious polarisation, and there is no better example of that in my view than the discussion as it was about Brexit before the 2016 referendum. But this can be seen in other nations and states as well – as is evident in Trump's history in the US. So how do we address this tension between 'root' and 'route'? Anthony suggests that Acts 2 – holding things in common – shows a way forward; that the best way forward is to work collaboratively, make sure there

are people around you who keep you accountable and tell you things you'd rather not hear; and adopt a dynasty similar to that of Martin Luther King, who used to say that we can "disagree without being disagreeable." We need constructive conversations about those grey areas between the two poles and the churches have a duty to ensure brotherhood and sisterhood across the myriad differences in Society so that we get closer to what God wants us to be.

And within those addresses, there are several challenging questions that face the ecumenical movement in Wales right now:

- How do we achieve the realisation of sisterhood and manifest brotherhood in our daily lives as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya encouraged us to do?
- How do we move beyond our worries about numbers and our rampant focus, as society – and churches – on growth as Hartmut Rosa questioned. How do we find resonance, to resonance, together?
- How do we avoid the challenges of the "new ecumenism" as the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew described it, and the bringing together that has been from various denominations in order to work together to promote an extreme agenda of 'traditional values' that is very far removed from the teachings of Jesus?
- What does it mean to us in Wales to break free as denominations, and indeed as ecumenical instruments, from the stories we tell ourselves and give us our identity to be able to turn instead to the story God has for us? Has the time come for us to decide that some of the structures of the past are hindering us rather than supporting us in working together anymore? Indeed, is there a future for Cytûn? On this last point, about whether Cytûn is necessary, it is worth reminding ourselves of the situation in Scotland where the ecumenical instrument ended some years ago. Subsequently, the loss has been recognised, and there are significant efforts currently underway to resurrect this, but it is being hampered since the process of deregistering the original charity - has not been completed - and beginning the process of re-registration will inevitably suck up energy and resources.
- Are we, as Anthony Reddie said, too wedded to our 'root' and is this preventing us from developing a new 'route' for the future?

Fortunately enough – as I said earlier – it is for the Trustees of Cytûn in consultation with the church leaders to answer these questions. But we can't

avoid the discussion or dodge the responsibility by not contributing to this debate. We have to think hard and creatively about what we want the ecumenical movement to be in the future; the tasks we want it to perform; and the resources we want to give to Cytûn, to carry out those tasks. The current situation where Cytûn with an operating budget of just £20,000 a year, once staffing and office costs have been covered, is just not sustainable. So hard and difficult questions, but if we don't ask them, then continuing in the same old groove will be our fate, and for me personally, life is too short to waste on that.

So back to the second mountain and a possibly glance at the future. So as some of you know, as well as working for Cytûn, I also work as an unpaid priest for the Church in Wales and am currently a priest at Christ Church, Roath Park, Cardiff. Until the end of last year Trystan Owain Hughes was the Rector of Christ Church, Roath Park and supervised me as curate there. For Christmas last year, I received a book from my mentor and friend, entitled *The Second Mountain: The quest for a moral life*. In it the author, David Brooks - a columnist for the *New York Times* - makes the case for climbing the second mountain in our lives. This is the idea in essence.

As we reach adulthood in our late teens, our twenties and thirties, we climb the first mountain. In this period, our aim and objective is to try to gain the recognition of society and to foster our status within that society. Our focus above all else is to command the admiration of society – with the key question being what can society do for me? I'm sure we all know some people who never leave this phase of their life. But for the most part most people, when they reach middle age have some experience or event that takes them down to the depths – either literally or figuratively and such an experience makes you re-consider your priorities. For me it was being diagnosed with cancer at the age of 48.

The second mountain, if you choose to climb it, is completely different – your focus, according to David Brooks, is on what you can do to contribute to society. So, during the first mountain period we focus on what we can get from society, but by the time we get to the second mountain, our focus is on the other extreme – our focus now is what can we do in order to contribute to society? So the question I would ask is – in light of Rowan Williams and Anthony Reddie's challenge that we need to change the treasures in our rucksack and not be wedded to the stories of the past – is it not time for the ecumenical movement in Wales, and indeed the churches in Wales that are

members of Cytûn, to realise that the first mountain has been climbed, and that it is now time to consider afresh how to climb the second mountain? To consider afresh what we as Churches Together in Wales can collectively contribute locally, regionally and nationally here in Wales to the life of our nation rather than waiting for what our nation, our society, can give us.

After all the essence of ecumenism is those verses from the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St John recounting how Jesus, the night before his crucifixion, *prayed to the Father saying "I pray for them all to be one, yes, as you are, O Father, in me and I am in you, for they too are in us, so that the world believes that it was you that sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, in order that they may be one as we are one: I am in them, and you are in me, and they are therefore brought to perfect unity, in order that the world may know that thou sent me, and for you to love them as you love me."* And perhaps the key phrase for us here is "One for the sake of the world" and it's no surprise that this is the title of one of the books of one of my peerless predecessors in this role, the Rev. Noel Davies, published in 1988.

So here are two quirky little closing stories that perhaps shed some light on what I have in mind – the first from the scriptures, from the Gospel according to St Matthew 9: 18-26 and the second from an entirely different field. The story from the Gospel according to St Matthew first:

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synaguge cam ein and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples.

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and crowd making a commotion, he said "Go away: for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout the district.

1. Responds to invitation and need – even from important – and sees beyond their status and sees the person – and the agony – involved in the request.
2. The woman with a haemorrhage – culturally as well as medically marginalised because of her ailment – and having suffered for a great number of years – but Jesus was never too busy to deal with a need, even on his way to aid someone important.
3. And then we get to the governor's home – and there's wailing and gnashing of teeth here – and what's striking is that Jesus has people laughing at him – but that doesn't distract him from his task.

So what are the lessons of this little piece for us as Christians considering the future of ecumenism in Wales:

1. First – that what Jesus is doing is responding to **a need** – from the important people in society and from the marginalized people in society.
2. Secondly – the importance of asking Jesus for what we need and having faith that he will answer our prayers – possibly in a way that we do not expect – but that Jesus does answer prayers.
3. And thirdly – that people want to laugh at us if we do the Lord's work – but that we shouldn't let that divert us from the path.

So let me end with the second story which is about flying. Now as some of you know Pwyll our eldest son is training to be a commercial pilot and has had a keen interest in flying, and has wanted to be a pilot, since he first started talking as a very small child. So, the story of "The miracle on the Hudson" has been part of the family legend since the incident happened on the 15th of January 2009. For those of you who aren't as familiar as we are with the story, I invite you to watch the film 'Sully', with Tom Hanks playing the plane's Captain, or listen to a podcast on BBC Sounds called *Witness History: Miracle on the Hudson*. In that podcast, we hear the voice of Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger on US Airways flight 1549 from La Guardia Airport in New York. But the most prominent character in the podcast is Dave Sanderson – the last passenger, of the 155 passengers, to leave the plane.

This is the story in outline. The plane, an Airbus A320, lifted off the runway at La Guardia airport in New York set for Charlotte in North Carolina. Two minutes and eleven seconds after leaving the runway, when the aircraft was at an

altitude of 2,818 feet, the aircraft struck a flock of geese with several of the geese, poor things, being sucked into both engines. Immediately both engines came to a stop. Both pilots went through all the steps on the check list for restarting the engines and concluded that it was not possible to do so. Sully soon told Air Traffic Control that he could not return to La Guardia or go either to another Airport - Teterboro in New Jersey twenty-nine miles away. In very few words he tells ATC - "We're going in the Hudson". Less than seven minutes after leaving the runway, Sullenberger somehow managed to land the plane on the Hudson River in one piece.

So, what of Dave Sanderson – the last passenger to leave the plane after it landed in the Hudson River? Dave was a regular traveller, flying over 100 times a year as a businessman. He always followed the same pattern having climbed on the plane – settling in his seat, opening his magazine and listening to something through his headphones. He never listened to the safety announcement, nor did he look to see where the doors were in order to exit the aircraft in an emergency.

When the plane hit the geese Dave heard the engine nearest him come to a stop. This had happened before, so he wasn't overly concerned. It would be a matter of turning back and getting another plane to continue the journey. Of course, he didn't know that the second engine had come to a stop as well and it was only when he saw from the Manhattan buildings much closer than ever before through the plane windows that he started to think something was wrong. That was confirmed when he heard Captain Sullenberger's voice over the sound system saying, "Brace for impact". Less than seven minutes after leaving the runway at La Guardia Airport, at 15.31 pm, Sullenberger managed to land the plane in one piece on the Hudson River.

The door opened over the wing. Dave Sanderson's first instinct was to jump from his seat and turn her for the door but as he did so, he heard the voice of his mother, who had died five years earlier, telling him "Dave, if you do the right thing God will take care of you", so instead of turning for the door Dave headed instead for the back of the plane to see if he could help some of the less able passengers. Back there was one old lady who was determined that she did not want to move from her seat. She had to be encouraged by other passengers, and Dave stood behind her and through teamwork Dave and others managed to get the lady to the door and out on the wing. Dave was now the last passenger on the plane and by the time he reached the door, the wing

was already full of people – no room for him. He felt it was all over – but once again he heard his mother's voice telling him – "No such thing as can't Dave!" so when he saw a boat hit the nose of the plane he decided to jump into the icy water (5°C) – remember this happened on 15 January. He arrived in the boat safely, thanks to the swimming lessons his parents had insisted he have as a child and was pulled from the water.

Asking him about the incident some time afterwards Dave was asked what remained with him about the accident and what happened, and particularly Dave Paterson, then Governor of New York State, of the event as "The miracle on the Hudson", and this is what he said:

"You've got to look at the entire situation. You have a plane in New York city the busiest city in the world, at rush hour, so at the busiest time in the busiest city, and passengers came together as a team - people who did not know each other and didn't care about each other - and it shows the power, when you check in your ego at the door, ANYTHING is possible."

Friends – as we look at the future of ecumenism together let's follow Dave's advice – "when you check in your ego at the door, ANYTHING is possible."

Thank you very much for your attention, for coming this evening, and especially to Casi and Rosie for the invitation to give this lecture in memory of Lloyd Jones – it has been a privilege.