

Tuesday 18th January 2022

And just like that, it's over. We didn't list it...we loved it. Was it ever in doubt?? Maybe I was having a midlife crisis after all. Like you, we watched it as scheduled on Wednesday night with no idea how 70+ hours of filming could possibly be condensed into 50 minutes. What was shown we felt was true to us and we were really thankful for the emphasis in particular on community throughout the process. For me, having seen the programme from both sides, there was both the seen and acknowledged community and the unseen community.

Watching the programme, you'd get the sense of the community round Caroline, me and the children here locally in our estate and also the wider community in Alnwick. Over the years, they have become more and more important to us based on that sense of belonging, support, compassion and shared lives not least when Caroline was poorly. It was right and good that they were acknowledged. But behind the scenes, a different community was at play. What you saw for the most part during the programme was Caroline and I interacting with Phil and Kirstie but of course you only saw that because of the team of people who never appear in front of camera but are integral to the programme being produced. Our builder Mick had about 30 seconds of airtime but in actual fact he was on site day in day out for 12 weeks managing the renovation.

And what about the crew? At any particular point, this team included up to three camera operators, a sound guy, director, researcher, producer and assistant producer. Over the six days of filming from March through September, Caroline and I spent time with this team over lunch and between filming to find out more about them, their own families, hobbies etc. In all honesty, whilst it was great to eat fish and chips in our back garden with Kirstie and Phil (both of whom incidentally we're down to earth and a joy to be around), it was as much a pleasure sharing life with this team and hearing their narrative. They weren't the only 'invisible' ones because of course beyond the film crew, lay the editing team holed up in a studio in Glasgow sifting through all that was produced and trimming it down for the final cut.

What you watched was the time, expertise, patience and effort of all these people, without whom Love It Or List It just would not happen. They matter. They are essential to the process. They are an unseen but gifted community.

Why mention this? Because you matter. Every.Single.One.Of.You. Whether your profile is in the public eye and 'front of camera' as it were, or whether your role is quiet, unassuming, in the background and 'out of shot', you all bring something of worth to those you encounter. Not many may be aware of the regular meals you make for a neighbour but, your neighbour does and it matters. Not many may know of the regular weekly call you make to that person isolated and lonely but, for that person it's worth its weight in gold and it matters.

Caroline and I may be your ministers but the church simply could not function unless everyone brought their gift for the sake of the church family and wider community. And yes there are some roles that immediately spring to mind because of their profile and we are so grateful for those on the eldership and deacons, or prepared to lead

worship, preach, facilitate junior church or midweek groups, operate sound desk or projector etc. As and of themselves all are important but again not the complete picture of church life.

Search deeper and find intercessors, hospitality providers, letter encouragers, listeners, prophetic voices, banner makers, people of peace, compassion bringers, welcomers, joy givers, hope restorers. The list goes on. What I'm saying is that you matter. You matter in the eyes of community where you live. You matter in the community of church family and you matter to God. You matter to God for the fact that you are the apple of His eye and also because you bring your gift in His service.

In the season of epiphany we remember especially what the wise men brought but, for me I'm also reminded of the final verse of In The Bleak Midwinter that we sang just last week. *'What can I give Him poor as I am, if I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet what can I give him, give my heart'*.

Bringing your gift matters and doing so from a place of knowing who you are in Christ means that your heart is aligned with what you bring. Therefore your role when fulfilled raises the name of Jesus high, is pleasing to God and for the glory of His kingdom. May you feel God's hand of affirmation on you this week and sense His pleasure as you seek to serve in whatever way you're called.