



Quiet deeds

"The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

Thus ends George Eliot's mighty tome, 'Middlemarch'.

Two incidents from the last week in parish ministry have served to make me think more about this.

The first was a funeral I took a week ago, for an 'ordinary' man called Mike Phillips. He lived almost all his adult life in the same house in Surbiton; he worked pretty much for the same employer (Kingston University), he had just one wife, two children and three grandchildren, and he died in his sixties from cancer.

The family expected around fifty people to attend; when it came, there were three times that number in the Church. In various, unglamorous ways, he had made a difference to an awful lot of people. He'd served as a school governor, and also as treasurer to his local branch of the scouts, but in a sense that only touched half of it. He was just one of those helpful people; a valued colleague; a treasured friend.

He didn't find a cure for cancer; he didn't win an Olympic medal, and he was far from a saint; in particular, the family were frustrated by his penchant for keeping 'useful' odds and ends to such an extent that

their garden has no fewer than five sheds, filled to the brim with now useless odds and ends.

But he always made sure his children did their homework, he always drove them to and from sporting fixtures, and he enjoyed teaching his grandchildren to read. It was a privilege to take that service.

Then on Monday, one of my elderly parishioners took a minicab to visit an even older parishioner at a residential home in Thames Ditton. When she got there, it turned out that the older one had been taken into Kingston Hospital. What stopped the visit from being in vain was the minicab driver, who insisted on taking my parishioner to Kingston Hospital to visit her friend there, and refused to take any money for the extra journey.

I don't know the name of that cab driver and I never will. And what he did won't go down in the history books as the greatest feat of kindness ever. It was nonetheless entirely kind; going the extra mile, to help out a fellow human, who was herself showing compassion to someone else.

I just share these examples as a counter to the welter of news that is somewhat grim. For sure, humans are capable of being idiots and we are making a good job of ensuring global warming will ruin the planet as we know it. But at the same time, as a race, we are capable of enormous kindness, and sometimes it's worth rejoicing in that as well.