

Sue You know, I've really missed talking to our friend Pete. Even though he's a bit ... well, odd ... he's quite entertaining isn't he? Let's see if he's in. Pete, are you there? *(silence)* ... Pete, are you there? *(silence)* ... Hello, anybody there?

Pete *(Pete appears but is tight lipped)*

Sue Hello, Pete, didn't you hear me calling.

Pete *(Sulks)* I heard you.

Sue Why didn't you answer.

Pete Bit odd am I? Last month John didn't call me odd. He has respect for me does John. I explained to him how to make a Crust-tingle and told him what all the symbols were.

Sue You mean a Christingle. And I seem to remember that you made a mess of making it and John had to show you the right way to make one. Although I grant that you were able to tell him what all the symbols actually meant. And you did a very good picture of a Christingle.

Pete Anyway, here you are. I suppose you're better than nothing

Sue Better than nothing? Well who were you expecting to see?

Pete I really wanted to see Jenni, Sue. *(Show photo of Jenni)* I've not seen her since March. I've really missed her. I've been so lonely stuck here in church all this time.

Sue Well, you've been in touch with people, Pete. I saw you talking to John about Christingles.

Pete Oh, John! He's even less interesting than you, Sue. But it's Jenni I wanted to see. There's nothing like a hug from another puppet.

Sue Well, I'm afraid hugs are out, Pete. Under the social distancing rules you can't get close to another person unless they're in the same bubble as you. And Jenni is in the same bubble as the Kenny family ... and you know that Jenni doesn't like any hanky panky!

Pete AAAAgh!!! This has been an awful year.

Sue Yes, you're right, it's been very difficult. We've all missed family and friends.

Pete And the leisure industry has gone right down the drain. I'm a puppet and I'm supposed to entertain people. But nobody wants to go out to a theatre show even to see ME.

Sue You've been seen on Zoom, though, Pete. We've met you in church services and you've done a school assembly.

Pete But it's not the same as the roar of the crowd and the great applause I get from a live show, Sue. I love to see my name up in lights. And when Joe sends out the notice for the Family Service he always puts "Featuring the star of the show - PETE THE PUPPET!" That's me, Sue. I'm meant to be a star.

Sue Well, I wouldn't go that far, Pete. God's the star of our church services. That's why we come to worship him.

Pete God ...? Well, yes, I suppose so. But I'm God's star evangelist.

Sue But, anyway, I think things are going to get better this new year.

Pete Do you really, Sue?

Sue Yes. We've got the vaccine. Have you thought, Pete, how amazing it is that effective vaccines, using completely new methods, have been created in 9 months? It usually takes years to do that. I think it's a miracle.

Pete A miracle? Like a God miracle? Like Jesus healing people - that sort of miracle?

Sue Why not? I certainly don't believe that God caused the virus. He wants only what's good for us.

Pete Well, the goodness was hidden last year.

Sue But it was just waiting to blossom. It's like a flower bulb. Look, here's a (tulip) bulb I want to plant. Bulbs are symbols of hope - of looking forward. I've filled my plant pot about a third full. Now, I put my bulb in. With this size of pot I'll put (three) bulbs in. Blunt end down and pointy end to the top. Then I fill it with soil. Now, it'll sit there throughout winter. But it promises to come up and show lovely colour in the spring.

Pete And it's like the hope has always been there, waiting to poke its head through and make things better?

Sue That's right, Pete. It's good to live with hope. Did you know hopeful people have less time off work, are more productive and tend to be happier?

Pete Hey, Sue, during lockdown I've been reading?

Sue Can you read, Pete?

Pete Of course, Sue.

Sue What have you been reading? Let me guess. The Very Hungry Caterpillar ... Peter Rabbit ... The Gruffalo... ?

Pete No, I've not read any of those. Are they any good? My favourite book was Nelson Mandela's autobiography (show picture of "Long Walk To Freedom").

Sue Whaaat!?!@\* The man who was put in prison for 27 years just because he wanted his people to be treated fairly?

Pete That's right, Sue. I think he was a Christian.

Sue I think he was, Pete.

Pete Well, it was a hope for a better future that kept him going for 27 years. Hope, Sue, hope.

Sue Well, there you are, Pete.

Pete You're close to God, Sue. What does God say?

Sue Well, God says that we're not to worry. Let's hear what he says ...

*Other Somebody read Jeremiah 29:11-14a with words on the screen*

Sue I like the way that God says he will do it. He says, "I have plans," and "I will listen to you," and "I will bring you back". God cares for us, Pete. Like the bulb I just planted, sometimes we can't see the goodness that God has prepared for us - but in his time it will blossom and turn these grey days into glorious technicolour.

Pete Wow, Sue, I'm looking forward to that. I bet he plans that Jenni will give me a great big cuddle ... maybe even a kiss.

Sue Now, Pete, remember what Jenni said - no hanky panky.

Pete I must say, Sue, you surprised me. It was good even talking to you. See you again soon, I hope. Bye everyone.

Sue Bye, Pete.

It would be great if Jenni appeared at the end of the service and shouted out for Pete. When Pete appears Jenni tells him off for not writing or some other witty interaction.