

Good Morning

After terror on the District Line at Parsons Green balaclava-clad police have laid siege to a suburban street in Sunbury on Thames. One resident was told, “You have one minute to get out of the house and to get away!”.

The focus of the siege is the home of Ron and Penny Jones ‘amid fears that it could have been used as a bomb factory’ by one of the young people they’ve fostered.

This senior couple have taken into their home over 250 children, and were given the MBE by the Queen in 2010 for services to children and families.

More recently they’ve taken kids from conflict zones in Syria, Iraq, and Eritrea. Talking online they’ve explained how they would all cook together and respect each other’s beliefs, adding ‘we open our hearts to all children’.

No-one knows what Ron and Penny Jones must be feeling right now. If there’s any substance to the allegation that one of their foster children has turned against the country that offered them refuge they’ll be retracing their steps and, no doubt, wondering if they could have done anything to stop it.

The open-heartedness of the Joneses is a symbol of the hospitality of the nation itself to welcome children in need from other parts of the world. And any soul-searching they might be doing reflects the soul-searching going on in our society.

Many foster parents and indeed many parents know the heart-ache of loving your children and seeing them become strangers to you by the choices they make.

It's why loving is such a risky business. And it goes right back to creation itself for Christians believe that although God made us out of love that was no guarantee that we would love him back.

Jesus told a famous story about two sons of a good father. The younger behaved as if he wished his father were dead and squandered his inheritance. When he then hit rock bottom he crawled home begging forgiveness. The elder son saw the lavish party put on for his homecoming and felt aggrieved. His father assured him that his own inheritance was safe and urged him to join the celebration.

It's as if Jesus was saying, 'don't let the offence of the offender fence off your own generous spirit'.

What's interesting about the story is that it ends without telling us if the brother ever went in to the party!

It's as if that question was meant to hang over us whenever we find that someone has betrayed our generosity.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE