

Being a bishop has some exciting moments. Recently I travelled on a new Shannon Class lifeboat. It was a wonderful sunny day in Fleetwood as the bands played and the crowds gathered for the Naming Ceremony and Service of Dedication of the lifeboat 'Kenneth James Pierpoint'.

And what a lifeboat we welcomed to the RNLI fleet. For a start it is propelled by waterjets instead of traditional propellers. Designed in-house by a team of lifeboat engineers, the RNLI has harnessed cutting-edge technology to ensure this new lifeboat meets the demands of a 21st century rescue service. Stepping inside the boat is like stepping aboard the latest space station. It will certainly take some effort from the crew to master all the systems on board.

As Mr Charles Hunter-Pease, RNLI Chairman, handed this new lifeboat into the care of the Fleetwood lifeboat crew, the alarm sounded and certain crew members disappeared quickly. I was assured that it wasn't staged.

It did however make me reflect on one of the most extraordinary tales of survival and rescue. I go back to 1997 when sailor Tony Bullimore was sailing in the Vendée Globe round-the-world race.

His boat, the Exide Challenger, capsized amongst the icy vastness of the Southern Ocean. Bullimore found himself sheltering in a tiny air pocket in the upturned hull, 2,500km from the South West coast of Australia.

It provoked the largest search-and-rescue operation undertaken by the Australian defence forces in peace-time. It involved heroic efforts by the RAAF fliers skimming about the giant waves in winds that rarely dropped below 45 knots. The Adelaide with a crew of 143 headed to the area where the boat had capsized. All this held together by the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Canberra.

What a moment when a knock on the upturned hull produced a response from Bullimore and then he swam out of his tomb.

This story, the title of book 'Saved' and the cost of the operation remind me always of a God who at great cost mounted a rescue act over two thousand years ago.

His Son walked out of a different tomb to the upside-down sailor. Both rescues had consequences. One helped everyone who followed it to wear a smile and step just a little lighter, the other has deeper, eternal consequences.

Thanks to the RNLI and the volunteer crew at Fleetwood for our maritime safety and for every reminder of a God who searches for all who are lost.

+Geoff