

Being a Visitor

Last week I experienced two 'Firsts'.

Having been married to an lifelong Portsmouth Football fan for over 41 years, I finally succumbed on Saturday and went to a match at 'Fratton Park', the home of Ian's beloved club!. To be fair, I have shown willing a few times previously and once visited 'Highfield Road' in March 2003 and Wembley for two Cup semi-finals. But this was my first pilgrimage to the hallowed ground. Portsmouth were playing Coventry who, as you may well know, won 2:0. We will move on swiftly from the result, with loyalties in tension!

The following day I was afloat again in new waters, literally, on board our son's recently acquired and much loved '*Nicholson 32*' - that's a boat!! All was smooth and lovely as he and his (also recent and much loved) wife navigated the calm waters of Portsmouth Harbour. It was great to see familiar sights from a very different perspective.

We moved into the Solent towards the Isle of Wight – waters getting a little bumpier – and up went the sails for a gentle and quiet float around the 'Palmerston Forts'

It was sometime later when the head sail refused to wind back in and we were seemingly at the mercy of a large flapping mass of canvas, that my sense of calm began to ebb away. The two sailors battled courageously, and with much energy, yelling of instructions and intuitive thinking got it all back under control in what seemed like eternity; probably about 30-40 minutes. (For those of you who understand these things, it was the head sail winding mechanism that was jammed and has now been attended to). My single task in all this was to keep quiet, keep still and keep out of the way! I was of no use whatsoever. I held one rope as a token gesture.

Both experiences were vivid reminders to me of being a visitor in worlds of which I know almost nothing. Beyond the conversations I hear around me in the family, I am a stranger in these worlds. I have no control, no input. And they are worlds which mean everything to those who share the passion of football or sailing. There are many such 'worlds' and I am comfortable in a few; an alien in many.

It got me thinking about this world. Do I truly belong or am I a fleeting visitor? Is this my home or am I 'passing through' not always knowing the 'rules of the game' or how to navigate life?

I guess the answer is Yes – Both.

I am fully human. I do belong here. This life is a precious gift and I want to learn and enjoy and engage as much as I can with the experiences and people I meet. I belong, with you and with others, in God's world.

And I am a visitor. The world doesn't belong to me or to any of us. Sometimes we seem to behave like we are here forever; that we can do whatever we want to each other and to the planet.

Jesus told the story about the man who got rich and didn't know what to do with all his wealth, so he built more and bigger barns to store it all in. (Luke 12:13-28). The message is clear. If we acquire wealth, status, power or possessions, we fool ourselves if we then believe they are ultimately important. I won't be taking any money or possessions with me when I leave this life. 'There 'ain't no pockets in a shroud', as my grandmother used to say.

I am passing through. It isn't about winning or losing – though sometimes it can feel like that. It may be like navigating difficult waters sometimes. How do I respond to people who irritate me? Decisions in public life and attitudes in society which anger me? Situations which are unjust and in which I feel powerless? I don't always know what to do.

I can do my best to align with the ways of God, with the example of Jesus, with the guidance of the Spirit. Sometimes I will mess up, miss a goal. Sometimes I will go adrift. I will try to keep my perspective as a visitor; here for the time being. And by God's grace, to know and share something of the Love and Care which is available for All, for Now, for Ever.

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