



“You are not a drop in the ocean, you are the entire ocean in a drop.”

Rumi

Next Meeting at Barrow Castle

Sunday 21 July

10.45 Coffee, 11.15 Service

Theme: Water

Led by Peter

Words to Ponder

A corporate senior management team asked Nasrudin whether or not he could prepare a communication policy for them, so that they could communicate better with all of their six thousand staff.

“Certainly,” said Nasrudin, “only first tell me, in communicating with your staff, what is it that you are not hearing?”

From *The Wise Fool’s Guide to Leadership* by Peter Hawkins

Reflection

We have all probably heard enough about the General Election by now, but there is one phrase that I have found cropping up in the aftermath of the event that is worth deeper consideration, beyond the political sphere: “We did not listen.”

Listening – *active* listening, not passive absorption of words – is essential to good relationships. We need to understand the meaning of the message behind what is said if we are to empathise with the speaker and give a thoughtful response. Most people reading this won’t need me to tell them something so basic and obvious, but it is fundamental, so I restate it here. *Listening* is rarer than it should be. What is it that we are not hearing?

Recently I spent a few days in South Devon. I stayed in a place that was well off the beaten track, and surrounded by trees. Often I simply sat outdoors and listened – to the sound of birds, and the movement of leaves. I did not think of anything particular, simply breathed in the natural beauty of the space around me. Doing so, I realised how much of our lives is filled with noise. Silence – or near-silence – is also a listening experience, as our Quaker friends have found. It was a rare opportunity for peace and renewal.

Yet we also need to listen to the voices that are raised in anguish in a world that is cruel to so many. There are people in war zones, areas of drought and its sister famine, nations governed by tyranny and repression of minorities, and island homes that will soon disappear as sea levels rise. We have heard them, because we now have global communications – but have we *listened*? If we have, we must respond, but the challenge is huge. How do we answer so many cries for help? Especially when people in our own society have largely stopped listening to the voices of either politicians or church leaders because they do not “speak to their condition.”

As so often, I do not know the answer. I only know that my Unitarian faith will encourage me to listen not only to the cries for help, and do what little I can, but also to the “still small voice of calm.” They are both essential.

Kay

Poem of the Month

When God Speaks

by Phillips Brooks

When God speaks to you,
you must not believe that it is the wind blowing or the torrent falling from the hill,
You must know that it is God.
You must gather up the whole power of meeting Him,
You must be thankful that life is great and not little,
You must listen as if listening were your life.
And then, then only can come peace.
All other sounds will be caught up into the prevailing richness of that voice of God,
The lost proportions will be perfectly restored.
Discord will cease; harmony will be complete.

Phillips Brooks was a 19th century poet and writer of hymns. His most famous composition was the carol O Little Town of Bethlehem. He was an Episcopalian Bishop in Boston USA.

A Service of Witness

Why, you may be asking yourselves, was I in South Devon taking a mini-break? I was lured by the prospect of the annual service at Moretonhampstead, on the edge of Dartmoor. The chapel there has had no congregation for many years, but to retain its registration as a place of worship it holds a service each summer, led by Rev Kate Whyman. Usually it is occupied by an artist who sculpts animals in willow so we are in good company.* A group of trustees maintain the building.

Over two decades ago Bob and I travelled up to the chapel during a holiday in Cornwall, at a time when he was a member of the GA Buildings Committee. We met with Jeff Teagle and others to consider the future of a historic building with very similar design features to the chapel in Marshfield where we used to meet as a Fellowship – not surprisingly, they were built around the same time. Consequently, although it's more than a day's round trip for me, I always like returning there when I can.

This year Gavin Howell had organised lunch before the service, and this was a great opportunity to see friends I haven't met in a while. Kate's service was excellent, and I found it particularly apposite: *The Spirituality of Place*. Driving around Dartmoor on the following day, bathing my mind in its timelessness, I felt that it was well worth the trip.

Kay

*Katherine Miles at <https://artisan-willow.com/index.html>

Best Wishes to

All our young people who have been taking exams this summer – may your results be all you hope for!

And Finally

As it was,
As it is,
As it shall be
 evermore,
O source of Grace,
With the ebb,
With the flow,
O source of Grace,
With the ebb,
With the flow.

A Celtic Blessing



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