

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 6th June 2021

I took my daily constitutional fairly late yesterday – it had been such a hot and sunny day that I decided to postpone my stroll till the cool of the evening – and I was not disappointed.

There were quite a few folk still around at 9.30p.m. as the sun was setting in a glorious pink sky beneath the Sleeping Warrior and the Kyles of Bute; about 8 paddle boarders were having a very happy time out on the Firth next to where the Open Air Bathing Pool once stood; a family was enjoying a BBQ on the beach; the lights of a large stationary oil tanker gleamed on the horizon; and, as ever, there were several dog walkers with their Labradoodles, Miniature Schnauzers, Spaniels, and one which I encountered for the first time last night was a Flandoodle! What a gorgeous puppy he was – enormous with such a cheeky face, and as his owner was chatting to me, the huge pup wanted to jump up and play, much to the owner's embarrassment. I assured her that it was perfectly fine!

Since that first Covid Lockdown last year, when our world stood still for four months, and in the ensuing ups and downs of this Pandemic, somewhere I have found to be such a solace, such a calming place, such a haven, has been our own Prestwick Promenade. I have been so grateful for it.

Most days, except in very inclement conditions, I have wandered along taking in the magnificent vista which it provides, and never a day passes but I meet both friends and strangers and have a good chat!

Last week, as I strolled past the lovely houses and flats which overlook the Prom, I was greeted by four young people who were sitting in a garden, enjoying lunch. "Mr Aitken!" they shouted, and I recognised them all as former pupils at Wellington School in Ayr where I had the privilege of being Chaplain. They laughed heartily and were amazed when I asked them if they were enjoying "an empty", while the parents were away. "Gosh!" came the response, "You know the right language!". Maybe I am not such a fuddy duddy after all!. And though I was invited to join them for a glass of Pimms, I respectfully declined as I thought that I might cramp their style!

Last night I paused for a few moments to survey the large gap where the Parkstone Hotel once stood and tried to imagine what is going to be built in its place – I hope that it will be something very much in keeping with the surrounding properties. (Are you listening, South Ayrshire Council Planning Department?).

Sitting for a few minutes on young Patrick's memorial bench, I reflected in the stillness of this need to take time out, just to "be". I knew Patrick so well – he had been a delightful student at Wellington School and was studying at Edinburgh University, and died in a tragic accident two years ago, over 600 people attending his funeral service. He was so loved by all ages, and you will often find many of his friends sitting on the bench given by his Dad and Mum and the family.

All of us have special places like Prestwick Prom which hold an attraction for us; places where we can take "time out" and reflect and pause in the hectic pace of life, with all its stresses and strains.

Maybe it's a spot in the countryside; a room in the house; a church; a park bench: a place where we feel at ease with the world and feel God much nearer. Did He not say, "Be still, and I know that I am God!"

It is so often in the quietness that He speaks to us.

Busyness, stress, activity are endemic in our society – we all find ourselves jittery and ill at ease as we try to cope with a plethora of demands. And this past year and a half have brought so many more added concerns and anxieties.

We surround ourselves with a host of labour saving devices at home, yet we still seem to be chasing our tails! And we are told that counsellors, therapists, self help courses have never been so much in demand.

There is an account in St Mark's Gospel when Jesus' disciples were absolutely drained – they were exhausted mentally, emotionally, physically. They had been on the go with Jesus, giving of themselves unremittingly in the care of others.

But Jesus, recognising what was wrong, said to those harried and hurried disciples, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while."

Jesus had no qualms at all about stepping back from His ministry to recharge physically, emotionally, spiritually.

And when we recognise what a busy bloke Jesus, the Son of God, was, and how much he needed to stop from time to time – then we should realise how much you and I need that too : that breathing space.

This is where Sunday morning worship comes in – that day in our week, where we stop all the hustle and bustle and get our bearings and soak in the peace, the atmosphere of heaven for that hour spent in Church.

Doctors will tell you that active participation in worship has health benefits – one of them being, this slowing down improves our blood pressure!

I am convinced that one of the reasons why there is so much depression and nervous strain around is the simple fact that Sunday has become like every other day of the week. It's no longer a day to stop, to relax, to spend time quietly with family and friends.

The good old fashioned Scottish Sabbath meant everything stopped – no shops open; no cinemas; no sporting activities; reduced public transport – so people had no other option to be take time to themselves and it meant a healthier, more relaxed society.

Just say NO to hurry.

Take time to yourself in some special spot; use your Sunday to come close to God, the source of all calm and peace... you will find a peace that bears you up in all the changing vicissitudes of life.

And, by the by, next week I am off for two days' in Edinburgh! Bliss!

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister