

Dear all

As I sit here, writing this letter, I am listening to Grieg's Piano Concerto – made (in)famous by Mr Andrew Preved and Morcombe & Wise. Fortunately, this recording has all the right notes in the right place!

One of the great constituents of comedy is when something totally unexpected happens, the humour being in the contrast between what is 'expected' or 'normal' and what we actually see. Some of the funniest sketches around show this – the one-legged Tarzan sketch (Pete Cooke & Dudley Moore) being another fine example. And, of course, nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!

Last night was the BBC TV 'Big Night In' – a much more muted fundraiser, combining Children in Need and Comic Relief. I actually enjoyed it more than usual in its pared-down version. It seemed much less manic, and the sketches were generally funnier. A particularly funny sketch featured Catherine Tate as Lauren (the teenager from hell!) and David Tennant as her teacher – her catch-phrase "Am I bovvered!" being cleverly absent when expected. There was also a funny turn from Prince William, implying that, in lockdown mode, he had not bothered to put his trousers on for a video call.

Sometimes, however, the unexpected is not funny. We are all under strain when normal patterns are not possible. For some this can be acute – for those who are extrovert, those who are lonely under the best of circumstances... Two particular groups are suffering immensely under these conditions: firstly those who suffer severe forms of autism (and their families) for whom any change of routine is catastrophic; and secondly, those experiencing domestic abuse, for whom this current climate can only exacerbate things. Anything we can do to encourage and support everyone in lockdown is invaluable – as are our prayers for all who find life hard, and for all working flat out to support us, and to find a cure.

Our Archdeacon, the Ven Justine Allain Chapman posted this a few days ago:

Resilience A to Z. O is for It's OK not to be OK.

I have struggled to find a balance between being a responsible citizen aware of the issues our world is facing and getting so overwhelmed by bad news and death tolls that my hope is eroded. Even though I limit the amount of times I listen to the news or look at a screen, and seek to give time to opening myself to what is life giving there are times when it's just too sad, or I am upset, angry. I have learned that it is OK not to be OK. Indeed not being OK is the reasonable, natural and compassionate response to what is going on.

It can be difficult to say it though. There's a judgement call to be made regarding what and how much you reveal about yourself and to who. Society seems to say you should always be happy and that being sad or showing sadness is a sign of weakness. Being human involves the full range of emotional responses. Being resilient involves acknowledging what you're having to cope with, what threatens you, as the first step to facing it and growing through the experience.

I am reminded of the prophet Elijah. He was capable, reliant on God, but otherwise pretty self sufficient and successful. He'd challenged the false prophets of Baal, won the contest and had to flee then from the evil Queen Jezebel. But then he wasn't OK. Languishing in the desert he feared for his life, felt his life was worthless and wanted to die. Exhausted he slept and an angel visited him, fed him and let him sleep (1 Kings 19).

Since Elijah was unused to being in the back foot, he was very keen to tell God about all the good things he'd been doing and how hard life was for him. God's response was to give him some time safely tucked away in a cave and teach him to honour silence. Elijah was too fired up, looking for God in the drama of earthquakes, wind and fire. It took him a while to realise God was to be found within, within a silence from which wisdom could emerge. For Elijah that meant securing a new political leader and someone, Elisha, to train up and eventually take over from him.

It is OK not to be OK, even, perhaps especially, if you are unused to acknowledging the feeling. Sleep, nourishment, some cave time and facing what is tough, not in the drama of it, but in a calm quietness, are necessary steps to honouring where you are at. You may well find the support of an angel or two, and later, insights that bring wisdom, purpose and a future.

The lovely hymn 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind' is partly based on this story:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSfk37xsoik>

Don Francisco has a well-balanced, if somewhat challenging, take on this in his song *It ain't no sin (to get the blues)*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhFjBrAz6V0>

I'll Never Let Go of Your Hand also by Don Francisco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCx6MEdeli4>

Finally, Nick Fawcett's prayer from a couple of days ago:

In our darkness, Lord

In our darkness, Lord,
be our light.
In our despondency,
be our hope.
In our dread,
be our assurance.
In our isolation,
be our companion.
In our need,
be our provider.
In our confusion,
be our lodestar.
In our brokenness,
be our healing.
In our sorrow,
be our joy.
Reach out to us, Lord, in this time of need,
and be our all.
Amen.

Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark