

3rd May 2020

Obvious

**“I make it a rule never to stare at people
when they are in obvious distress.”**

Arthur James Balfour, on being asked what he thought of the behaviour of some attending the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 at the end of World War I

My father told me that he learned three lessons in his basic training for service in the RAF in 1940: 1: Never volunteer; 2: If it moves, you shoot at it; 3: If it doesn't move, you have to paint it. I'll maybe touch on lessons 1 & 2 another time. But I've really taken my dad's lesson 3 to heart.

To keep me busy, I've been doing all the painting jobs I've been promising to get round to for ages. I was painting the back-garden gate the other day – because it doesn't move – and I lost count of the number of people who stated the obvious. Neighbours, passers-by, delivery-men, refuse collectors – observing social-distancing guidelines, of course – all saying, “I see you're painting the gate.” Of *course!* Isn't it obvious?

I recalled a Barry Appleby *Gambols* cartoon from the *Daily Express* from years ago when the long-suffering George was so fed up with people stating the obvious that he took the garden gate he was painting off its hinges to finish it in his kitchen, only to be faced with his wife, Gaye, announcing, “Hello, George. I see you're painting the gate!” Doh!

There is much that's obvious in this current crisis: distress, loss, isolation, and a lot more. But one of the *most* obvious is that we don't know when it will end or what the lasting effects will be. We've heard the obvious stated over and over again, and we'll have joined in too.

Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, said: *When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the goals, adjust the action steps.* So, instead of stating the obvious, perhaps we can change how we think and what we're doing. Stating the obvious can be tiresome. So why not “adjust the action steps” and let the obvious wait for a while.

That's enough for now. There's still painting to do. Isn't it obvious?

A prayer for today

*God of all time, make it obvious what needs to change,
in my life, in my loves, in my faith and in my future. Amen*

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