

26th August 2020

Scars

**“My marks and scars I carry with me,
to be a witness for me ...”**

John Bunyan The Pilgrim’s Progress

I’ve had a scar under my chin since I was seven years old, the result of being scalded by boiling water. I don’t remember much about the trauma, but I’m told I was seriously ill afterwards. I recall getting toys when it wasn’t my birthday or Christmas, so somebody handled it well for a small boy!

I survived, but not unmarked by the incident. The Doctor said the scar on my neck shouldn’t be a bother, “until the boy starts to shave.” He was right. The unevenness of the scar *is* a bother when I shave, though it’s hardly noticeable now. I’ve learned to live with it for more than sixty years.

A few days ago I wrote about “accepting”, not expecting a “post-Covid” world to appear as if we were emerging from a bad dream, but learning to live with this virus, willing to accept a life with its continued effect on us. And I suggested bereavement is the same. Dealing with the burn on my neck and the scar it has left is a metaphor of exactly that.

Firstly, my scar hasn’t gone away. My adult body has grown up with the imperfection. I live with it. It’s part of me. Secondly, from time to time – regularly enough for it still to matter – I don’t like the way it looks, and I wish it wasn’t there. I’d rather the trauma hadn’t happened. And for a moment I look at it and say, “Damn!” And then I get on with other things. And finally, occasionally – thought rarely now, thankfully – I nick myself when I shave under my chin and I bleed on my collar. The trauma of 60 years ago still has an immediate effect that messes me up.

There is no “post-burn” for me. There is living with the scar – usually unknowingly; sometimes angrily; occasionally painfully. Can you recognise this in bereavement? If you can, then you’re dealing with your loss – six months, six years, sixty years, however long after the trauma – in a healthy, normal fashion. Your life grows round the scar. It is part of who you are. It marks you and makes you. Like John Bunyan, it is always your witness.

A prayer for today

Loving God, I carry the scars of life, to be witnesses of my humanity.

I try to accept the scars of life, as a reminder of healing and fullness. Amen

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