

28th August 2020

Sauntering

“Will the neighbours say, ‘He was a man who used to notice such things.’”

Thomas Hardy, Afterwards

I’m not a great one for sauntering! Going from place to place is about ... well ... going from place to place with a purpose. I run upstairs two-at-a-time. I walk briskly to the local store. My focus is on getting somewhere important. Sauntering is for idlers. Or is it ...?

Centuries ago, when villagers on the pilgrim routes through Europe asked travellers where they were going, the pilgrims responded: *À la sainte terre* – to the Holy Land. So, they became known as “saunterers”. Yes, they had a purpose and a goal, but the journey mattered too. The travelling, as well as the destination, was important. “Sauntering” was a good thing!

When my elder grandson, Alexander, was small, we took a walk through our village. It had no great purpose, other than to fill up an hour of childcare and get some fresh air. So, we sauntered, and called it a “noticing walk”, looking for things that were out-of-the-ordinary. We found several pair of trainers hanging from a tree, one shoe tied to the other and thrown onto the branches so that they hung down like strange fruit. Neither of us had any idea why! We saw flags and bunting around a house and its garden, and reckoned this was the home of one of the children who’d be in the Gala Parade the following weekend – followed by a deep discussion about what a Gala Parade was. We walked past a bank of wildflowers in the park. We noticed two seagulls squabbling over a crust of stale bread, and we both agreed it was time to head home for a snack.

I noticed more than Alexander did, it has to be said: I heard birds singing; saw a man teaching his daughter to ride a bike; felt rain in the air; smelt the fish by harbour; loved the squeeze of a little hand in mine. That’s what sauntering and noticing does – slows you down; makes you more aware; increases your amazement; gives you a chance to appreciate life.

Sorry! I’ve gone on too long. I think I need to go out and saunter for a while. For, as it turns out, sauntering is a good thing after all!

A prayer for today

Living God, help me to notice today what I need to remind me of you. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>