

18th October 2020

Bells

**“O Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done.
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting.”**

Walt Whitman, O Captain! My Captain!

Last Sunday morning the bells of my local church rang out to welcome people to worship – for the first time in seven months! While worship has taken place mid-week now for several weeks, this was the first time worship had been offered on a Sunday during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There will be some, therefore, who with Walt Whitman’s sailor to his Captain, will cry out that the final destination has been reached; the ship has survived; the prize has been achieved; the people are exulting; the bells can ring, and ring. I can understand that. But, the truth is, we haven’t reached the end of this Covid-19 business. Whatever port we’ve arrived at that allows us to worship in our church on a Sunday, this is no prize. We may have “weathered every rack” thus far, but there are still stormy waters to face as further journeys into the unknown lie before us.

So, why do the bells ring? Should we have kept them silent, because the ultimate destination – through this world-wide pandemic-storm – hasn’t yet been reached? Did we ring the bells too soon? No we did not! For as the bells ring out in recognition of *this* journey ended, the people of God have a right to exult and sing their praise – even behind masks. Let’s celebrate one journey completed before we continue the next.

In his poem *The Bells*, Edgar Allan Poe says this:

*Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells.*

Today I rejoice that the bells are sounding again, thankful that we have come through a time of trial and tribulation. “The bells I hear” are from my church today. O Captain! My Captain! I exult at their ringing, with all the people of God, as I praise you again today.

A prayer for today

*Loving God, my ship is small and the storms are great.
Keep me safe. Steer me carefully. Guide me home. Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon
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