

22nd November 2020

Doomed?

"I am my father's spirit; doomed for a certain term to walk the night."

William Shakespeare, Hamlet

Dad's Army is a BBC sitcom about the British Home Guard during World War II, broadcast between 1968 and 1977. Many of the characters have their own catchphrases: the pompous Captain Mainwaring with his "Stupid boy!"; the excitable Corporal Jones with his oft-repeated "Don't panic! Don't panic!"; and Private Frazer, a dour Scot who has a negative view of most things and regularly warns, "We're doomed! Doomed!"

When I worked in the hospice, people's sentiments often echoed Private Frazer's. When lives were assessed in the face of mortality, there were many who felt they were "doomed" to ultimate condemnation. But why is the prospect of judgement used to scare people? Why is the possibility of hell used as a frightener?

The Book of Revelation tells us, "Their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur ..." In a book about the origins of familiar measurements, I read that a scientist, Dr Paul Darwin Foote, has calculated that the temperature of heaven is hotter than hell! If hell abounds with lakes of molten sulphur, he figures the temperature to be around 444.6°C. But working on the suggestion in Isaiah that in heaven the sun would radiate "seven times the light of seven days", he fixed the temperature of heaven as 525°C, considerably hotter than hell! Oh, come on!

I have two ways of countering such wasted brainpower. The first is to follow the thinking of Eleanor Roosevelt when she wrote that while she believed there must be some "going on" after this life, there wasn't any point in worrying about it. It's enough, she said, to ensure we make the best of *this* life. And the second is to share the love of God I've come to know in my own living. The bible tells me, "God is Love". Can I view such a God as one who delights in retribution and condemnation? Welcome, compassion, acceptance, forgiveness are the attributes of the God I believe in. Private Frazer might *still* say, "We're doomed! Doomed!". But I say, "No!", not when God loves me the way I know he will always do.

A prayer for today

In the Father's Spirit, stay with me and save me from all harm. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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