

24th November 2020

Dumps

**“O the grand old Duke of York, he had ten thousand men.
He marched them up to the top of the hill and he marched them down again.”**

Traditional Nursery Rhyme and Children’s Game

I’ve been talking to a number of people about feeling “down in the dumps”. All of us are struggling to understand why we feel as we do. Living with restrictions; the shorter, colder days; uncertainties about Christmas plans? Who knows? But feeling “down” seems to be commonplace – just like the eponymous hero of the children’s nursery rhyme.

No one knows who this “Grand Old Duke of York” actually was. One “claimant” is Richard, Duke of York, who was defeated at the Battle of Wakefield in 1460. He had an army of 8,000 men who were waiting for reinforcements at Sandal Castle during England’s “War of the Roses”. The castle was on top of a Norman “motte”, a prominent hill, giving Richard an advantage over the 25,000 strong Lancastrian army in the valley below. Inexplicability, Richard chose to sally forth *down* the hill to fight, and in a battle at Wakefield Green he lost his life, as did nearly half his army. “When he was up, he was up”. In a secure position, he would have done well to stay there. “When he was down, he was down”, and in deep trouble!

Years ago, I worked with a man who was an alcoholic. He’d gone downhill a *long* way, and he only recognised his fate when he was at his very lowest point. *Alcoholics Anonymous* were his salvation, and, in time, he managed to climb up out of the mire. And he found his God again too, the God who’d stayed with him when he’d gone down all the way to the very bottom. “When he was up” he had known his God. But “when he was down” he needed his God all the more.

Sometimes we go downhill due to our own folly. And sometimes we’re in the dumps through no fault of our own – simply as a reaction to what’s going on around us. We need to be reminded that faith isn’t just about the “ups” of life, the praise, thanksgiving and joy. It’s also about the “downs” too, the pain, suffering and human failure. Up, down, and in between, God is with us, no matter what.

A prayer for today

Be with me, Lord, on the way up and on the way down, and in the middle too! Amen.

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