

15th December 2020

Grind

"My life is one demd horrid grind."

Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby (Mr Mantalini)

When I was a parish minister, there were some years when I came to dislike the run up to Christmas because it was such a grind. If I was in ministry now, this feeling might well have returned, and I could be saying with Dickens' Mr Mantalini – and perhaps even with you – that "life is one demd horrid grind". So I've started thinking about this "grind" in a different way.

The poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in translating Friedrich von Logau's *Retribution*, writes this:

*Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all.*

Here is a God for whom the grind is important, not in the sense of tedium or being over-burdened, but for the purposes of exactness and effectiveness. Here is a God who is happy to take time, to let things unfold slowly, to wait and to work until his purposes come to fruition. When the "mills of God" grind, they do so as they need to ... in God's own time.

The coal-fired Power Station at Cockenzie, close to where I live, was built in 1968. Having outlived its usefulness, it was decommissioned in 2014 and demolished in 2015. When it was fully operational, the Power Station had a series of "pulverising" or grinding units which ground down the raw coal until it had the consistency of sand. This "pulverised fuel" burned more effectively than large lumps of coal, thus reducing waste. In the greenspace beside the still vacant site, and as a tribute to all those who've worked in the Power Station, stands one of the Grinding Disks and six of the massive Grinding Balls. It's an impressive sight, indeed.

But it's also a symbol that grinding matters. Getting things right; making sure everything's efficient; taking care; being attentive, effective and patient; looking for exactness and tolerance; taking things slowly.

If that's God's way, might it not also be ours? Might my times, even in Advent, when "life is one demd horrid grind" not be times that fit into a greater picture, God's purpose, God's patience, in God's time?

A prayer for today

Lord, when life is a grind, give me patience to see your purpose in it all. Amen.

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