

14th January 2021

Friendly

“A friend is worth all hazards we can run.”

Edward Young, Night Thoughts

Among the trials of parish ministry was the unpredictability of dogs. I could be prepared for the behavioural quirks of canines with which I was familiar, but I was apprehensive of dogs I was meeting for the first time.

On one occasion, I was faced with a man in his hallway fighting to hold back a ferocious Alsatian on the end of a massive chain. “Oh, it’s yourself, minister,” he offered, while the Alsatian’s fearsome barking said otherwise: *Get out of my territory!* I slid deftly past the growling beast, located the front room and sat on the sofa, as far away from the dog as possible. Its owner, now sensitive to my apprehension, looped the dog’s chain securely round the leg of the sideboard. “Good boy, Caesar. Good boy!” he said, patting his panting hound. I decided not to debate the point.

The man suggested a cup of tea might help and slipped into the kitchen. The dog, now dripping at the jowls, growled throatily at me. I grinned in response, secure in the knowledge that the recalcitrant animal was safely tied to the leg of the sideboard. But I relaxed too soon, for the Alsatian wasn’t finished with me yet. It instantly shot out from its “den” and headed straight for my thigh, stopping six inches from its lunch on the end of its quivering chain. But I was safe, *safe* ... till the dog, still chained, started to drag the sideboard across the room, the rucks in the living-room carpet being the only thing slowing it down. Just then, the man reappeared, laughed loudly, hauled the dog and sideboard back to the wall, and said, “Och, never mind, son! Caesar is just trying to be friendly!” *Friendly?* Yet, I have to report that, despite this inauspicious start, the bold Caesar and I *did* become the best of friends, and, over the years, he never needed to be chained to the leg of the sideboard again.

Sometimes friendships happen naturally. Often, they have to be worked at. Occasionally, they take us by surprise. But friendships always matter and are surely worth “all hazards we can run”, as Edward Young suggests, just as I found with Caesar, and, I hope, he found with me.

A prayer for today

What a friend we have in you, loving God, despite the hazards we create. Amen.

An original reflection © Tom Gordon

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