

5th February 2021

Confused

“O, nothing is more alluring than a levee from a couch in some confusion.”

William Congreve, The Way of the World (1700)

I was planning the funeral service of an elderly man with his only son, and our conversation turned to the choice of hymns. “Well,” said my companion, “my dad wasn’t a great churchgoer. But there was one hymn he did like. I heard him sing it several times.” I smiled, thinking of *Abide with me*, *The Lord’s my Shepherd*, or even *All things bright and beautiful*. So, with pen poised, I asked, “And what hymn was that?” “Oh, it’s *The Old Rustic Bridge*,” the man said with pride. “*The Old Rustic Bridge?*” I replied, trying hard not to frown. “I don’t know that one too well.” “Now, that surprises me, for I thought it was familiar,” was the response. “How does it go?” I enquired, sceptically. “Like this ...” he said, and, taking a deep breath, he burst into song – with a pleasing baritone voice ...

*On a hill far away, stood an old rustic bridge,
The emblem of suffering and shame ...*

“Oh,” I cried. “You mean *The Old Rugged Cross*.” “Aye! Aye! That’s the one,” was enthusiastic reply. “It was my dad’s favourite, right enough.” So, a few days later, we did indeed sing *The Old Rugged Cross* at the crematorium, lustily, in classic Scottish sentimental fashion, with not a dry eye in the house, because it was an old man’s favourite hymn.

And *The Old Rustic Bridge?* I discovered later that it is, in fact, a legitimate song, recorded by, among others, Foster and Allen. A loving son had simply got himself confused and conflated two pieces – though I’m still somewhat puzzled by the image of an old rustic bridge on a hill! But let’s not be too critical. Yes, he was confused. But he was doing his best, and, with patience and understanding, we got it right in the end.

The Roman poet, Horace, wrote, “Patience makes lighter what sorrow may not heal.” We all get confused sometimes. So let’s pray that *we* might be responded to with a patience that makes our failings lighter to carry, and that we can find the healing touch of understanding, tolerance and acceptance when we need it most.

A prayer for today

Lord, be patient with me in my confusion. You know I’m trying to do my best. Amen

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