

10<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## Different

**“And now for something completely different.”**

*Catchphrase, Monty Python's Flying Circus*

Some years ago, I was asked to cover Sunday services for a friend who ministered in two rural parishes. I had a service to conduct at 9.30am in a small village, with a congregation of around twenty or so, and a second, in a larger population centre, at 11. I arrived at the village church about ten minutes before the service was due to begin to find a dozen folk standing at the church gate. I approached them and introduced myself as the visiting minister and was solemnly informed that the church heating had broken down and that the building was desperately cold.

As the group at the church gate grew, there was much debate as to what to do. “We could sit inside and be cold,” said one, “if the minister keeps things short.” “It’ll not be the same without a full service,” said another, accompanied by several nods. “I think we should go home,” said a third – with more nods. Just then, a lady stepped forward, “Or we could go to my house,” she suggested. “It’s two doors down. There’s a big fire in the grate and I have a piano too. We’ll all fit in, I’m sure.” So, in short order, with hymn books retrieved from the church, we were in the front room of a family home. Chairs were brought from the kitchen and cushions put on the floor. The organist took his place at the piano. And yours truly – with no lectern, or pulpit, or Communion table to use – popped himself on the arm of a sofa with his notes on his knee.

The service lasted for half an hour, and we had a cup of tea and home-made Dundee cake afterwards. I had time to get to the next service for 11 o’clock, which was very different – not better or worse, just different.

I learned later that the heating had been repaired in the little village church, and that two-dozen people still worship there every Sunday – leaving another warm and welcoming worship centre in the front room of family home two doors down completely empty, a piano still silent, and home-made Dundee cake waiting to be finished. It could be *so* different.

### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, different doesn't always mean better. But if new things can stand alongside the old, we can find ways of doing things differently at your prompting. Amen.*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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