

1st June 2021

Scale

**“The great task of this century
is that of revising the old scales of value in every field.”**

David Gascoyne, A Short History of Surrealism

While I was a hospice chaplain, I had an end-of-life conversation with a man who requested help to plan his funeral. Several things were to be included, such as particular hymns and music. But the most important element was a firework display in order to, and I quote, “celebrate life”. It was to be a *big* firework display, the kind he’d experienced at the *Edinburgh International Festival* or the city Hogmanay’s celebrations.

There was a problem with that, however. To have such a massive firework display you have to have explicit clearance from the Air Traffic Control people at Edinburgh airport so that the flightpaths of planes taking-off and landing aren’t disrupted. And, to get such permission, the relevant authorities have to know the date, the time and the duration of the display, and the permission had to be in place *months* before. Of course, despite the cleverness of the medical people in working out a prognosis and “how long was left” for him to live, the accuracy of such a timeframe just wasn’t possible. So, reluctantly, the scale of his firework display as part of his funeral celebrations had to be scaled-back.

Two weeks ago, for my daughter’s birthday, our family had a meal together in our kitchen for the first time for fifteen months. *We* might have expected to have a big firework display, such was the importance of it, not just celebrating a birthday, but a celebration of life, and love, and family, and hopefulness, and an end to restrictions, and all that matters to us. But there were no fireworks. Indeed, there were no “over-the-top” shenanigans, just a meal, and a toast, and tears, and chat, and laughter, and the opening of presents, and smiling at cards, and respectful hugs.

But scaled back? Not at all! All that mattered was there. And all that mattered was done. And all that mattered was achieved. My wife remarked that she’d had a smile on her face – and in her heart – for days. Who needs fireworks when the sharing of family love can make you smile like that?

A prayer for today

When love is shared, there is no scale of measurement.

When old scales are being revised, let them always measure what really matters.

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