

9th May 2021

Spontaneous

**“The fascination of what’s difficult
Has dried the sap in my veins, and rent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart.”**

W B Yeats, The Fascination of What’s Difficult

At a recent Church gathering, we’d completed one section and were about to move on, when the minister in charge announced, “Perhaps Tom can close this part with a prayer.” I’m not saying with Yeats that this request “dried the sap in my veins”, nor would I indicate that I don’t approach such issues with a sense – if not a fascination – of “what’s difficult”. But I have to say, that my heart was beating a bit faster as I called people to prayer.

Fortunately, spontaneous, extempore prayer is something I’m comfortable with. Having been brought up in an evangelical tradition, I’m familiar with prayer-meetings where “free prayer” is expected. In College I’d learned that unscripted prayers can – and perhaps should – have a structure. Because of that, most of my public prayers are never written down in advance. Hopefully what I offer “in the moment” is helpful.

In the 1980s I worked for a short time in *The Church of the Saviour* in Washington DC. Regularly, especially in the African American community, free prayer was common, and at the close of most gatherings whoever was responsible would call on someone to end with prayer. Often the person chosen was Yolanda, whose prayers were simply wonderful. “Spontaneous joy and natural content” poured out of *her* heart to the benefit of everyone present – and, I’m sure, was pleasing to God too.

It had to happen ... One evening the Pastor said, “And now Tom will lead us in prayer,” and, my prayer, like the invitation, was spontaneous. As we were leaving, the Pastor thanked me and said, “I would have to say ... you prayed like Yolanda.” It’s an accolade I’ll never forget. If what reached people’s ears and rose to the Throne of Grace contained a fraction of the “spontaneous joy and natural content” of this woman’s prayers, then my prayer had done its job. And I like to think that it pleased God too.

A prayer for today

*Lord, when we hear Yolanda’s prayers, give us the confidence to join in
and make them ours too. Amen*

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