

6th June 2021

Repeats

**“I can repeat poetry as well as other folk if it comes to that –
‘Oh, it needn’t come to that,’ Alice hastily said.”**

Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass

I take daily medication, and I get a monthly supply of tablets from the local pharmacy. To save me renewing my prescription with my GP, it’s on “repeat”, and I get a text-alert when it’s ready for collection. Very clever ...

My iPhone allows me to play music “on repeat”. Headphones on, a track I like – or a song I’m trying to pick up – and I can play it as often as I want, with no reprogramming or pressing of reset buttons necessary.

When I’m learning a new piece of guitar music, I play it over and over again. It’s “muscle-memory” which I’ve touched on before. The more often I repeat it, the more comfortable I am playing it well.

There’s a downside to repeats, of course. We moan when programmes are repeated on TV, for example, used as “fillers” to pad out a schedule. But don’t some shows bear repeating – again and again – such as classic comedies or significant dramas?

When Jesus was asked by an expert in the Law what made a full life, he offered The Parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the most meaningful stories ever told. While a traveller lay injured, important people who should have known better left him to his suffering. But a Samaritan, a foreigner, had compassion on the beaten man, took him to a place of safety, paid for his care, and promised to return. “Have you got that?” Jesus asked. “I have,” said the legal expert. “Well then,” said Jesus, “go and do the same.” See what’s been done, my friend. *Put it on repeat*. Do it over and over again, till it becomes second nature.

The American novelist, Samuel Bellow, wrote in *Mr Sammler’s Planet*:

It is sometimes necessary to repeat what we all know. All mapmakers should place the Mississippi in the same location and avoid originality.

We know the importance of compassion. Its location in our lives should never change. It’s necessary for the good things we all know well to be repeated – in words and action – for the good of all.

A prayer for today

An act of compassion can be a one-off. An act of compassion repeated can become a pattern. And a pattern of compassion repeated can become a familiarity. Amen.