

12th August 2021

Tickets

**"It's beyond our means to pay so much to enter.
And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket."**

Fedor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov

In his late-19th century work, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Russian novelist, Fedor Dostoevsky, has Ivan and Alyosha discussing the nature of evil. Ivan explores the issue of harmony, the place of evil and the nature and purposes of God. "Too high a price is asked for harmony," he says. "It's beyond our means to pay so much to enter." The whole business seems beyond his understanding, and, as a result, continuing his "payment" metaphor, he proclaims, "I hasten to give back my entrance ticket."

It's the notion of "an entrance ticket" into a world of complete understanding of the nature of good and evil, and the place and purpose of God in it, that intrigues me. Is there such a ticket to be gained when we have understanding and faith, and to be given back if we don't?

When I was confirmed as a member of the Church of Scotland in 1966, I was a "New Communicant". To allow me access to the Lord's Table, and to keep my name on the list of Communicant Members, I was given a Communion Card, to be handed in at the church. My father called his card "a ticket". For many years of my ministry, such Communion Cards were commonplace. Before that, the "ticket" was a "Communion Token", a little pewter token the size of a current five pence piece which was given to you if you were considered good enough to come to the Lord's Table.

Tickets for Communion? That's about judgement and not grace, control and not freedom, exclusiveness and not welcome. The Jesus who said, "Come to me all who labour, and I will give you rest ..." offers us an invitation to commune that is unconditional. The table is open to all.

Marty Haugen writes in his lovely hymn, *Let us build a house*:

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat:

A banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space,

As we share in Christ the feast that feeds us:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Entrance tickets? Like Dostoevsky's Ivan, I gave mine back a long time ago.

A prayer for today

Lord, you bid me come and you welcome me home. Thank you. Amen