

1st December 2021

Fish

“You're teaching a fish to swim.”

Anonymous, Latin saying

When I attended “Selection School” – the assessment process in my student years for prospective candidates for the ministry – I was unspeakably nervous. My aunt, with whom I’d stayed overnight, hadn’t helped my tensions one bit. We were watching a football match on TV, and this mild-mannered woman was screaming at the players of the team she *hated*, as if this game was the most important thing in the world.

At the venue the following morning, I was directed into a room full of people, all in animated conversation. The gentleman who was chairing the event asked my name, and then – presumably to help put me at my ease – said: “Ah! Mr Gordon, from Fort William? Yes, you’re very welcome. And tell me, do you fish?” To which I hesitatingly replied: “No. But my uncle John has a fish shop.” What? For goodness’ sake, man! Where does *that* get you? My excuse is that I was unspeakably nervous, and just blurted out the first thing that came to mind. Fish? Uncle John ... It makes sense now, but back then, it only compounded my nervousness.

Fortunately, I “passed” the selection process, and the rest, as they say, is history. I’ll return to my uncle John another time, but for now, this memory prompts me to think of the times in my ministry when I’ve been guilty of breaking the Latin maxim above by trying to teach fish to swim. Our modern warning might be: “Don’t teach your grandmother to suck eggs”. Fish already *know* how to swim, and don’t need me to tell them what to do. There have been times I should have *listened* more to the wisdom and faith people already had, and not always expect to be the teacher. There was much I should have learned from those who were able to swim much better than I could, and had been doing so for a *long* time.

So now, if fish come up in conversation, I’ll not to blurt out anything about my uncle John’s fish shop, but possibly see it as the beginning of a conversation about important things – especially what I need to *listen* to, the lessons I need to learn from the wisdom of others.

A prayer for today

A prayer based on fish today? Will it be enough to say I’m still fishing around for good things I can take on board from other people? Did you catch that? Amen

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