

20th November 2021

Different

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”

Henry David Thoreau, Walden, 'Conclusion'

I was struck by a comment from a recent *Children in Need* documentary, centred on BBC presenter Matt Baker's "Rickshaw Challenge". The challenge this year took a pedal-powered rickshaw all over the country, to publicise BBC TV's annual *Children in Need* appeal, highlight the charity's projects, involve some of the young people and, of course, raise lots of money. Since the first Rickshaw Challenge in 2011, it's raised over £25 million.

One of this year's participants was living with physical disabilities – at least, that's how I saw it. But not her! "I'm not disabled," she said. "I'm just differently-abled," and told us of the full life she lived, the sports she did and the lessons she could share. *And* with great stoicism, in the rain, she finished her leg of the Rickshaw Challenge in great style. Differently-abled. Different, but able. That had an impact on me.

It brought to mind an incident from High School. When "my year" got back after the summer break, there was the inevitable sharing of where holidays had taken us. Before mobile phones and digital photography, there was the invariable exchanging of photographs, of people and places, home-life and travels, events and random happenings. Until Ian appeared and shared his bulging album of photographs – of cows! Cows were Ian's passion. Friesians, Aberdeen Angus, Belted Galloways, Highland Cattle, Ayrshires, Herefords. There wasn't a breed he hadn't photographed. And there was nothing Ian didn't know about cows. Not one of us understood that – or bothered to try! Football, girls, magazines and TV were our stock-in-trade. Cows? Weird! Ian? Just different.

How quick we are to label people who don't conform to our expectations, or don't seem to "fit in", who maybe hear Thoreau's "different drummer". But do they have to keep pace with *us*? Shouldn't they keep step to the music *they* hear, though the beat may not be ours?

And Ian? He became a successful dairy farmer. So, what did *we* understand about being different?

A prayer for today

I am unique, different from everyone else, and still loved – thank God! Amen

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