

30th December 2021

Between

**“Wiv a ladder and some glasses,
You could see the ‘Ackney Marshes,
If it wasn’t for the ‘ouses in between.”**

Edgar Bateman and George Le Brunn, If it Wasn't for the 'Ouses in Between. (1894)

The week between Christmas and New Year has always been strange for me. When I was small, it was a “nothing” time. Christmas celebrations were over. The decorations and tree were still up, but the presents had been opened, played with, and some of them were already broken. Most people had returned to work. And the Gordon family hadn't begun to pack for their trip to granny's for the Hogmanay celebrations. In parish ministry, it was a “collapsing-in-a-heap” week after the rigours and overwork of the run-up the Christmas. It was time to switch the phone off, play with the children and have some much-needed restoration time. In hospice chaplaincy, when Christmas was a difficult mixture of pleasure and pain, it was now back to end-of-life care, waiting, nurturing, praying.

In all of these periods of my life, as New Year approached, there was excitement about a new beginning *and* apprehension about the unknown. As in Bateman and Le Brunn's song, I could have tried climbing ladders or using spyglasses, but I could never see what lay ahead. As with a view of “Ackney marshes”, there were too many “ouses”, lots of barriers, in between. So I had to wait ...

As a child, I had to learn that family life would take its course. Decisions would be made, and plans enacted, all outwith my control. In parish ministry, it was a “thinking time”, a much-needed space to renew my sense of purpose and my energies. And in hospice chaplaincy, it was about consistency. The New Year was no more or less than the “click of the clock”. People's needs, sorrows and pains, would be the same. Availability, nurture, comfort, compassion would still be offered.

And you? What will be will be. So, rest up for a while. Take stock. Be patient. Think about your sense of purpose, and the consistency of your compassion, being renewed. Calm your troubled soul and learn to wait. For that's what's needed, in this strange, in-between time.

A prayer for today

An in-between time is never a “nothing time” if God and I are resting together. Amen

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