

15th January 2022

Small

"Small is beautiful."

E F Schumacher, Book Title (1973)

I was gently chided by a friend for using the Scots' phrase, "Lang may yer lum reek" in one of my "Thought for the Day" pieces when I was offering New Year greetings. He never revealed *why* he was concerned about it. Maybe it was the use of the Scottish vernacular, or maybe in an age of environmental awareness, encouraging people to have a smoking fire in their hearth was a no-no. What he made of "Back tae auld claes and purritch" in a later piece, he hasn't said – not yet, anyway.

To pique his interest further, here's another Scots' phrase for all of you to ponder today:

Mony a mickle maks a muckle!

A *mickle* is something small, and a *muckle* is something big. So, put all the small things together and you create a large effect. "Greater than the sum of its parts" might be an English equivalent.

There are many aspects of life in which people feel their small contribution doesn't amount to much: from church life to environmental protests; in local and national politics; from adjusting your carbon footprint to taking a stand on peace issues. In the work environment, it could be: "I'm only a cleaner"; "I just work part-time"; "I'm merely a volunteer." In the minds of many, small equals not-that-important, of lesser value, not achieving much, insignificant, or even trivial.

And I say "No!" *Mony a mickle maks a muckle!* All these small contributions, fitted together, gathered into one enterprise, have a huge effect. It echoes the protest song from the 1960s: *But when two and two and fifty make a million, we'll see that day come round ...*

Don't underestimate the value of the small. Don't do down those who have a *mickle* to offer. There might be *muckle* good that comes from the value of us all working together. "Small is beautiful", Ernst Schumacher wrote in the 1970s. I would echo that, and maybe even a Scots' translation – *Mickle is Muckle Braw* – might find favour with my friend!

A prayer for today

Small? Not the love I know that changes everything. That's braw tae! Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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