

16th January 2022

Transformed

**"I am not now
That which I have been."**

Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

The first time I stood behind the Communion table in worship in my new parish, I announced the "uplifting of the offering" and waited till the offering plates were brought forward. There were four people on duty, two women and two men. The women were dressed in their Sunday finery, and one of the men wore a sober suit, white shirt, collar and tie. The second man, younger than the first, was more casually dressed. As he took his place beside me, I noticed the open-necked, casual shirt, denim jacket, chinos and trainers. And he had several days of stubbly growth on his chin. "Wonderful!" I thought. Here's a man coming as he is, with no judgement or pressure to conform. But I was wrong ... this was by *no* means the most wonderful part. For I learned later that this man was an ex-offender. He was now back home with his family, and had picked up his involvement with the church. Wonderful? That wasn't *nearly* enough. It was absolutely amazing, practically and theologically. Whatever way I looked at it, the truth of the Gospel, the call of Jesus, the love of God's people and the embracing mission of the Church was right there, standing by my side.

When I reflected recently on the story of Steve Burnett making a violin out of discarded floorboards from Ernest Shackleton's former home, my mind went back to that young man. What could have been discarded, was given a new life. What might have been easily dismissed, was renewed. What had been broken, was transformed into something beautiful. *He* could have said with Byron, "I am not now that which I have been". And if he had done, he would have heard the whole Church rejoice.

A prayer for today

*Thank you, God, for a broken world, picked up, examined, ready to be thrown away,
but taken, reformed and made whole again.*

*Thank you, God, for a broken hope, dismissed, cried over, ready to be cursed,
but taken, reclothed and offered a new beginning.*

*Thank you, God, for a broken soul, blackened, ruined, ready to be rejected,
but taken, loved and nurtured into a new possibility.*

*Thank you, God, for a broken life, useless, failed, ready to be discarded,
but taken, restored and beautifully transformed. Amen*