

23rd April 2022

Recognition

"Present themselves in objects recognised in flashes."

William Wordsworth, The Prelude

I was recognised! My baseball cap, Covid mask and transitional glasses darkened by the sunshine were no deterrent to a sharp-eyed shop-assistant in an Islay shop a couple of months ago. "Enjoying your time with us?" she enquired. "It'll be coming to an end soon." She smiled, and, detecting a puzzled frown behind my dark glasses, explained: "I was at the funeral you conducted last week. I expect you're popping in to see how the family are." I nodded. "Tell them I'm asking for them," she concluded.

I wasn't hiding from being recognised. It's just that with such an engaging person serving me in the local shop I would have had no chance if I was. And anyone, how did she figure I was about to do a pastoral visit, and did she know that the chocolates I was buying were for that purpose?

In his 1883 autobiography, Anthony Trollope recounts an incident when he was a junior boy in Harrow School. One day he met the headmaster, Dr Butler, in the street and was chastised for the school being "disgraced by so disreputably dirty a little boy as I." Of this he wrote:

He must have known me had he seen me as he was wont to see me, for he was in the habit of flogging me constantly. Perhaps he did not recognise me by my face.

The part of Trollope's anatomy by which he expected to be recognised I shall leave for you to contemplate. But a more appealing quotation comes from Catherine Zeeb, in her book *Beginnings: A New Perspective*. These are words she attributes to Abraham Lincoln:

Don't worry when you are not recognised but strive to be worthy of recognition.

This is the worth of being "recognised in flashes", as Wordsworth would have it ... So I shouldn't be worried about being recognised by a shop assistant. I'm happy with a flash of appreciation that I would be doing a post-funeral pastoral visit, *and* even taking a box of chocolates to a bereaved family. That'll be recognition enough.

A prayer for today

As I strive to be worthy of recognition, help me to remember where such opportunities of loving service come from – and what they mean. And if people recognise your Love in those little flashes of recognition, so much the better. Amen