

21st May 2022

Transitions

“We have fallen out of belonging. Consequently, when we stand before crucial thresholds in our lives, we have no rituals to protect, encourage and guide us as we cross into the unknown.”

John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us* (A Book of Blessings)

I was once asked to bless a house. The folk weren't religious, but they needed an event, a ritual to mark a new beginning for them and their family. The "housewarming" wasn't enough, they said. They wanted something spiritual, from someone who could create the "something spiritual", to mark the transition from what was to what would be.

In my early ministry, much time was given to "hatches, matches and dispatches". Most babies were brought to church for baptism, often regardless of the beliefs of the parents, because the church was where new life was celebrated. Most weddings were in churches too, or in the Manse in days gone by, with a ritual being appropriately enacted. Most funerals would have a minister officiating – Humanist and Civil Celebrants were unheard of. "You'll know just what to do, minister," someone once said to me. For all these transitions, there was a ritual, an agreed, expected, understood, relevant ritual to mark an important moment in people's lives.

And now? How do we mark those important "transition points" in life? Often, we don't. How many babies are baptised these days? Don't lots of couples live together without the ritual of marriage? (I don't think there's a ritual for the arrival of a "bidie-in". **) Even funerals sometimes have the air of "performance" and can often be devoid of ritual or mystery.

So, in the transition points of life, if you don't participate in a "traditional" ritual or don't have one that makes sense, create one that works. Mark the transition in some meaningful way. Remember it. Recognise its importance. It doesn't have to be public. It can be profoundly personal, something just for you. Moving house, changing job, the ending of something important, as well as the "hatches, matches and dispatches", deserve a pause, a reflection, a ritual to mark the meaning of the transition.

What can we create to "protect, encourage and guide us as we cross into the unknown"? That's for you to work on, folks, for, in the words of my erstwhile parishioner, "You'll know just what to do ..."

** "Bidie-in": a live-in lover

A prayer for today

I pause at my moment of transition and mark this change with my changeless God.

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