

7<sup>th</sup> May 2022

## Noise

**“In summertime on Bredon,  
The bells they sound so clear  
Round both the shires they ring them  
In steeples far and near,  
A happy noise to hear.”**

*A E Housman, A Shropshire Lad*

I was conducting worship in my local church. The minutes ticked past as the time for the Sunday service approached. “Time for the bell”, one of the elders said, and disappeared into the gallery to do the necessary. But when I took my place at the front of the church, I was aware of a disturbance in the church foyer, where a stranger was remonstrating with the people on door-duty. By the time we stood to sing the opening hymn, the brief disruption was over, and the worship proceeded uninterrupted.

I enquired later what the cause of the commotion had been. “It was a man who lives locally,” I was told. “He was annoyed that the church bell had woken him up.” “Nightshift?” I asked. “No, a hangover, I reckon. He says it’s a police matter. ‘Disturbing the peace’, kind of thing. ‘You’ve not heard the end of this,’ was his parting shot.”

There *was* no follow-up to the man’s complaint. The church bell continues again, post-Covid, to be rung every Sunday, hangovers or not. But this local man was clearly no “Shropshire Lad”. Not for him a “happy noise to hear” when our church bell sounded so clear, only annoyance that his Sunday lie-in had been disturbed. I will say this now to our local complainant: church bells ring, in shires, towns and village, to welcome folk to worship. This *is* our “happy noise”. You are welcome here anytime, hangover or not. You have a place in our fellowship. The bell welcomes you.

But in case you still think we’re “disturbing the peace”, I will also say this to you and others in our village: when the war in Ukraine is over, I hope our church bell will ring again. I hope *all* bells will ring. And even though there may be some who will be coping with celebration-hangovers at the end of this awful conflict, let them be disturbed and take notice. Let them be awakened to the bells that ring out peace – for everyone.

### **A prayer for today**

*God of Love, I long to hear your bells of peace ringing again –  
soon, I pray. Amen*