

27th June 2022

Intimacy

“The opposite of loneliness – it’s not togetherness, it is intimacy.”

Richard Back, *The Bridge Across Forever: A Lovestory*

I recently conducted a wedding at which there were no guests. The legal witnesses were the photographer and the piper. The only other people present were the venue-manager and me. And it was one of the most meaningful weddings at which I’ve officiated – because of intimacy.

In preparation for the ceremony, I recalled with the couple two weddings I’d conducted as a parish minister, on two successive Saturdays. The first was the biggest wedding I’ve been involved with, 150 guests, with all the attending “frills”. It was too much, both at the church and the over-the-top reception. The bride, as I recall, was quite overwhelmed by it all. It was too showy and over-riding, so much so that the event itself contrived to squeeze out the meaning of the occasion. I didn’t like it at all.

The second was in a small side-chapel in my church with only the bride, groom and two friends present. It was beautiful. Gentle, deep, personal and purposeful, the wedding ceremony had all the meaning one could ever have hoped for. And it was all based on intimacy.

We have taken “intimacy” and applied it all too readily to human, sexual contact. But intimacy is more than that. It’s about closeness, attentiveness, meaning, mutual engagement, eye-contact, listening, awareness, and lots more. It encapsulates honesty, openness and personal affirmation, as it did for a wedding of a couple who didn’t need any guests.

In Church life, we can become obsessed by “numbers”. “Is my church unsuccessful because few people attend?” “Does this congregation have a future if it’s so small?” “Shouldn’t we create bigger units so lots of people can be together for worship and fellowship?” I get all of that. But alongside that, do people not yearn for intimacy? Do we not benefit from closeness, awareness, honesty, acceptance, attentiveness and personal engagement? Shouldn’t we value the “small” and not only the “large”?

So the questions on my mind today are these: Are we aware of the “intimacy” people crave and seek to benefit from? And where is the importance of such intimacy being built into the Church’s restructuring?

A prayer for today

Lord, when all else fails, help me to remain intimate with you. Amen