

23<sup>rd</sup> July 2022

## Passwords

**"A wise man named Bernard Baruch took me aside and put his arm around my shoulder. 'Harpo my boy,' he said, 'I'm going to give you three pieces of advice you should always remember.' My heart jumped ... I was going to hear the magic password to a rich, full life from the master himself. 'Yes sir?' I said. And he told me the three things ... I regret that I've forgotten what they were."**

Harpo Marx (with Rowland Barber), *Harpo Speaks* (1961)

A "consumer" programme on BBC TV was alerting viewers to the worrying increase in on-line scams. A wise expert was giving advice, focussing on the need to have secure passwords for our on-line activities. I remember three things she said (better than Harpo Marx, it seems). The first: "Have a different password for every on-line activity and change them regularly." The second: "You wouldn't go on holiday without making sure your house was secure, the alarm on, and the security lights working. So why leave your computer unguarded? It's the equivalent of leaving your keys in the door, your windows open, and putting up a big sign saying, 'Come in and help yourself.'" And the third: "The most common password is 1-2-3-4-5."

Passwords! How necessary they've become. Perhaps you aren't "cyber-aware" enough to act on the expert's advice. Or maybe like Harpo Marx you just can't remember them. Yet for our security and peace of mind, they are so important. Take care with your passwords, folks. I wouldn't want to hear you'd been scammed. And it got me thinking ...

How often do we hear of people in our churches feeling excluded, as if they didn't know the password to "get in" to the purposes, activities and fellowship: code words; expectations of behaviour; knowledge of what to do and when; the acceptance of beliefs; where to sit; even how to look or dress. Of course, we don't issue people with a "WiFi Code" when they enter or slip them a piece of paper with "Today's Password" so they can participate fully and feel at home. But might we tacitly communicate that there's a password that everyone else knows but a new person doesn't? Or do we understand the apprehension of the stranger in our midst and do our best to ensure they have complete access to all that we are and all that we do without the need for a password?

### A prayer for today

*Lord, you offer me what I need with no password – other than to say "Yes!"*