

5th August 2022

Familiarity

“Familiarity breeds contempt – and children!”

Mark Twain, *Notebooks*

I'll maybe look at the “children” part of the Mark Twain quote another time, but for now I'll concentrate on the more “familiar” part. It's been in my mind for a while, and it's been emphasised in recent months.

Those of you in the UK know that TV schedules are often disrupted by coverage of special events. But it seems to have been more extensive than usual this summer. Wimbledon fortnight; the women's Euro Football Championships; and now, wall-to-wall coverage of the Commonwealth Games. It throws the familiarity of TV programming up in the air. Add to this the fact that retirement offers the opportunity to become familiar with day-time TV listings, and when you find that *Homes Under the Hammer*, *Songs of Praise*, *Pointless* and even news bulletins and weather reports are not where you expect them to be, then familiarity takes another hit. Familiarity may or may not breed contempt, but it certainly breeds security and comfort, and we don't feel good when these are disrupted.

But what of relationships? Isn't it possible that the security and comfort of long-term relationships might breed ... if not contempt, exactly, then lethargy, even boredom, and often “taking people for granted”? Might it be helpful sometimes for the familiarity of these relationship “schedules” to be disrupted with freshness, a new pattern, showing love in a different way, taking someone by surprise? Remember my recent thought about giving a gift when it's not a birthday or Christmas? Isn't it time for the challenge of facing up to familiarity in a loving relationship?

And what of faith? Might we be in danger of taking our relationship with our God for granted: holding to familiar understandings and patterns of thought; having the same routines for worship and prayer; believing that there's nothing more for us to learn or discover? Such familiarity, I suspect, will not breed contempt with God – at least, I hope not – but it could put us in a place of lethargy and even boredom, don't you think?

If our spiritual life matters, we'll be the better for disrupting it a little – or even a lot – from time to time. When over-familiarity is challenged, freshness, excitement and newness might well take its place.

A prayer for today

Lord, if I'm overfamiliar with you, challenge me to meet you as if it was the first time. Amen