

1st October 2022

Good

**“I hope you have not been living a double life,
pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time.
That would be hypocrisy.”**

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Reflecting on visiting yesterday took me back to an incident at a visit which has remained with me for forty years.

I'd conducted a funeral of a lady in my parish, and it was clear that her husband, devastated by her death, was going to have a hard struggle coping. When I went to visit him after the funeral, he was in a terrible state: unkempt; smelling of drink; unshaved. He was embarrassed, distressed, and in no state to benefit from anything I had to offer. So I suggested I come back a week later, and tried to have him understand the date and time I would call. I left feeling shaken by the experience, and fearful for his welfare. So I wrote to him, to remind him of our arrangement, to wish him well, and to say I would give him as much help as I was able. "You're a good man," I concluded, "and I'm sure you'll come through this."

I was apprehensive when I called to see him the following week as per our arrangement. But I was surprised when the door was opened by a well-dressed man, wearing a fresh shirt and tie, clean shaven and with slicked-back hair. We shook hands, and he invited me in his kitchen where he was making a coffee for us both. There, attached to the fridge-freezer door by a fridge-magnet, was my letter. Underlined in red was the day and time of our meeting. "Sensible," I thought, "a good way to remember the appointment." Further down, I saw more words underlined in red: *You're a good man*. "I can understand why you've underlined the date and the time," I said. "But why have you underlined *that* part." He smiled as he handed me my coffee. "Because," he said, "no one has ever said I'm good in the whole of my life – and I'm seventy-two years old."

Why do we not tell people they're good when it's what they yearn to hear? Why do we not tell people they're good, when the whole world gives them negative signals? Why do we not tell people they're good when it's possible no one has ever said that to them before? After all, wouldn't we want to hear that from someone too?

A prayer for today

In my double life, I know that I can be bad. Please remind me I can be good too. Amen