

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2022

## Large

**"Let us labour for that larger and larger comprehension of truth."**

Horace Mann, *Thoughts*

I used to be larger than I am now, so "large" wasn't good. Overweight, frumpy, unfit, sloth-like. It was hard to bear mentally – *and* physically, with a lot more weight to carry than was healthy! So I chose to slim down. How I did that and how much weight I lost is irrelevant here. But I've decided that, in this sense, Horace Mann's "larger and larger" isn't good at all.

In Church life, we're struggling to make sense of not being "as large" as we were. The Church of Scotland has fewer ministers, smaller numbers attending worship and less of an influence on society than it once had. Not through choice. We haven't slimmed down because we've decided to. It's just happened! And we're struggling with that. But I wonder if we need to come to terms with this truth: large isn't always a helpful measurement of worth. While we wish to "labour for that larger and larger" Church, might there be a message for us as we face the reality of "the small"?

In chapter 7 of the Old Testament's Book of Judges there's a story about Gideon on a campaign with 32,000 men, more than enough for the task ahead. But God says: "You have too many. Tell those who don't want to go on, to return home." 22,000 give up the fight. 10,000 left? "Still too many," God says. "Take them to the water and let them drink. If they kneel down to drink, they're out! But if they cup the water in their hands and lap like a dog, as vigilant men, you should keep them." 300 are left with Gideon. What follows is a vivid and fascinating account of a tactical victory, one that William Wallace, Napoleon or Field Marshall Montgomery could take lessons from. 32,000? *Way* too large for this task. 300? Job done!

I'm not arguing that the Church shouldn't be "missional" (whatever that modern label from the twisting of the English language *actually* means). But I *am* seeking to encourage us to believe that, with God's guidance, the smaller number still has a valuable job to do. Perhaps we've concentrated so much on the "large", that the reality of our smaller forces seems inadequate. But then, the story of Gideon and his force of 300 might be the "larger and larger comprehension of truth" we really need.

### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, when we listen to you, and serve you as a result, do numbers matter? Amen*

*An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon    Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>*