

2nd September 2022

Owls

"He respects Owl, because you can't help respecting anybody who can spell *TUESDAY*, even if he doesn't spell it right; but spelling isn't everything."

A A Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*

I attended a wedding recently where the wedding rings were brought in by an owl. The groom donned a gauntlet and faced the gallery with an out-stretched arm, ready for the owl to fly in with the rings in a pouch attached to its claw. There were gasps of amazement as the owl did its job. Well, it *nearly* did its job. But this owl was having an off-day, for instead of alighting on the groom's gauntlet, it flew straight for the bride, glided past her (thankfully), hopped onto the altar and subjected the assembled company to a long and steely stare. The situation was rescued by the owl handler coming to retrieve the recalcitrant bird, remove the rings, give them to the minister, and exit stage-left ... complete with a smirking owl.

There are clearly two sides to a jobbing owl: one, when it's obedient and cooperative; the other, when it's insubordinate and self-willed. While we might see owls as attractive – which they undoubtedly are – and wise – which may or may not be the case – they are still wild, predatory birds of prey. Cute, spectacular and photogenic for a wedding video, or wild, defiant and independent? Both, it seems ...

The Bible doesn't have much to say about owls that's favourable. The Book of Leviticus gives this instruction to God's people:

These are the birds you are to regard as unclean: ...the eagle, the vulture ... the red kite, any kind of black kite, any kind of raven, the horned owl, the screech owl ... the little owl, the great owl, the white owl, the desert owl ...

And the owl was a symbol of civilisation reverting to a state of ruin. In the Book of Zephaniah, there's this warning to a disobedient people:

He will stretch out his hand against the north ... leaving Nineveh utterly desolate and dry as the desert ... The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns. Their hooting will echo through the windows, rubble will fill the doorways, the beams of cedar will be exposed.

Cute, wise and photogenic, or unclean, wild and disobedient? That's the owl for you. And, goodness, that could you and me as well!

A prayer for today

Lord, make me wise enough to know that you're wise enough to know me. Amen