

30th September 2022

Visiting

“My father used to say, ‘Superior people never make long visits, have to be shown Longfellow’s grave or the glass flowers at Harvard.’”

Marianne Moore, *Silence*

I have no desire to see Longfellow’s grave, and I suspect I’ll never be in the environs of Harvard looking for glass flowers. But I *do* know a lot about visiting, and in that regard, I reckon Marianne Moore’s father is quite right.

I’ve been involved with visiting people all my life. In parish ministry, it was visiting the housebound, calling on homes where there was sickness or tragedy, meeting with families to plan a celebration, or just to having a chat with a confidant. In the hospice, it was about spiritual care, funeral planning and bereavement support. Pastoral visiting, in all its forms, is something with which I am more than familiar.

There are four things I always had to consider when visiting in such circumstances. Firstly, you never knew what to expect ... “Jist move the dirty washin’ aff the settee an’ sit yourself doon.” “I huvnae got a spare cup, so will this Pot Noodle container do?” “Oh, a see the cat’s been sick on your shoe. Wait a minute, and I’ll get a hankie ...” Yes, it’s all true. And add to that: my feet sticking to the carpet as I walked up the hall; the Alsatian having to be chained to the leg of the sideboard in case it attacked me; and my trousers getting damp because I was sitting in something unmentionable ... Yes, you never know what to expect.

Secondly, I was always a guest. No matter the chaos around me, the bizarre happenings, or the strange people I met, I was always their guest. This was *their* home, their environment, and it was for me to adjust to that and not for them to adjust to me. Thirdly – lifted from the guidance of Marianne Moore’s wise father – visits didn’t need to be long: sometimes I couldn’t get away quickly enough; often, I would have been imposing if the visit had been over-lengthy. But the worth of the visit was by being there, and the value of the visit was measured not in its duration but through the engagement with the issues.

And fourthly? The most important ... the Spirit of God was in that household before I got there and would remain there after I left. Now, *that* made the visit “superior”, and always as long as was needed ...

A prayer for today

The Spirit of God with me? I’m enjoying this visit. Amen