

26th March 2023

Tolerance

"Compassion and tolerance are not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength."

Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama, *as quoted in "Words of Wisdom: Selected Quotes by His Holiness the Dalai Lama" (2001) edited by Margaret Gee*

Following a funeral of an old friend, the conversation turned to how people react to ministers in respect of the content and delivery of their sermons. While most folk confine themselves to a polite "thank you" or "lovely service, minister", I instanced a lady who always had a vial of smelling salts in front of her, which she ostentatiously took a sniff of if she disapproved of anything I said – from a split-infinitive to a biblical reference. Someone told us of a man in church who took copious notes during every sermon – for his own edification or to challenge the minister, who knows? My own mother noted words she didn't understand from a sermon – and phoned the minister afterwards to tell him so.

Not every reaction to what we do or say – from sermons to any opinion – will be positive. Sometimes the response is negative, from the gentle, "I'm not sure I agree with that", to the downright vehement. All the more reason for tolerance and respect to be at the forefront of our minds in any debate. If our behaviour to one another is not informed by such things, from preaching, through social issues, to questions of morality, religion or politics, how are we to maintain constructive dialogue and create a peaceful coexistence when views differ?

In his 1860 novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, George Elliot has this line:

The responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision.

So, let's foster that "wider vision". Tolerance isn't an optional extra. It's a responsibility whenever differing views are expressed. Would the "Twitter Sphere", and other social-media platforms, not be more constructive places to have dialogue and debate if tolerance and respect underpinned all contributions – *and* responses?

Compassion and tolerance are vital, as the Dalai Lama has said, and are a sign of a strong, and not a weak, society. They will always build stronger bonds among us, to everyone's benefit – including those who sniff smelling salts when they disagree!

A prayer for today

*Lord, it looks like, for all my faults, you tolerate me.
Help me to show that same tolerance to others. Amen.*