

26th May 2023

Unexpected

“To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect.”

Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*

I overheard the following conversation recently.

A: *D’you know, the gravestone was quite unexpected.*

B: *What?*

A: *Yes. We got to the church on Sunday, and there it was, a gravestone, in the front grass. Grey granite. Cemented in. Inscription and everything.*

B: *Is there a body under it?*

A: *No one knows?*

B: *Who put it there?*

A: *No one knows that either. It just appeared. And no one knows what to do.*

B: *Oh! That’s quite unexpected right enough.*

A while ago I shared the story of a row of barrows that appeared one day outside my church, chained to a pipe. Unexpected? Certainly that – though we *were* able to find out who’d put them there. I once admired an Autoharp in a parishioner’s home, saying I’d love to learn to play one. I came home the following day to find a brand-new Autoharp and case in my front porch. Unexpected? Indeed ... and I’m left wondering what would have happened if I’d admired the BMW in their driveway.

Barrows, an Autoharp, even a gravestone ... unexpected! Perhaps I should cultivate Wilde’s “thoroughly modern intellect” and expect the unexpected more than I do. But I wonder if we *offer* the unexpected as much as we might. We plan, organise, put order into our lives, because it gives us a structure. But it also becomes the pattern of self-giving, time to care, acts of kindness. Can we rediscover the unexpected in these too?

A friend was out with a colleague when they passed a street-beggar. “Any loose change,” the man asked. Instead of passing by, or dropping coins in a paper cup, the colleague stopped and said: “I’m terribly sorry, my man. But I’ve reached the limit of my charitable giving for this month.”

Can we counter that, do something spontaneous, unplanned, beyond organising, over our set limits, an unexpected action that makes a difference? Not a gravestone in a church garden or barrows in a driveway. But might being unexpectedly kind be what someone needs today?

A prayer for today

Lord, help me never to set limits on my kindness – because you don’t! Amen

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