

13th July 2023

Challenged

"Life is full of challenges. How you handle these challenges is what builds character. Never be afraid to be who you are."

Erin Brockovich, *Take it from Me: Life's a Struggle, But You Can Win*

The quote above comes from Erin Brockovich's first book, published in 2020. Or at least I *think* it does, for it appears all over the internet as a motivational quote without reference to its source. But I use it today because I've been reflecting on the idea of challenge.

Erin Brockovich is an American environmental activist who was instrumental in building a case against *Pacific Gas & Electric Company* involving groundwater contamination. This was the subject of an Oscar-winning film, *Erin Brockovich* in 2000, starring Julia Roberts. She has also hosted *Challenge America with Erin Brockovich* on ABC TV. Facing challenges is at the heart of this campaigner's life. "Life is full of challenges", she says. And that, surely, applies to us all.

In an episode of *The Simpsons* which I dipped into recently as I was "flicking channels", I was struck by a little piece of dialogue.

Principal Skinner: *Of course, we could make things more challenging, Lisa, but then the stupider students would be in here complaining, furrowing their brows in a vain attempt to understand the situation.*

Lisa Simpson: *It's too hard. My hand is slipping. I can't do this, Bart. I'm not strong enough.*

Bart Simpson: *I thought you came here looking for a challenge.*

Lisa Simpson: *Duh! A challenge I could do.*

The idea of challenge is surely to wrestle with a dilemma, task, problem or question that *isn't* something "I could do". If you could always do what's to be done, then it wouldn't be a challenge. It would be familiar, routine, predictable, and easy to achieve. But a challenge?

Faith is a challenge. To be committed to justice and peace is a challenge. To examine every day what prayer means, is a challenge. To be concerned about the environment is a challenge. To be accountable to one another is a challenge. Living a Christian life is a challenge.

Let's give ourselves to these challenges and believe that how we handle them will surely build us into the people God wants us to be.

A prayer for today

Lord, help me believe I have what it takes to rise to the challenge of serving you. Amen