31st August 2023

Counting

"I shall count myself blessed, and blessed, and blessed."

William Morris, *in 'William Morris & Red House' by Jan Marsh*

I've had a birthday! It doesn't matter when, but it matters how it was received: by me, with a sanguine attitude, for when you get to my age, one day is much like another, and another year to the tally doesn't make a lot of difference; for others, it was responded to with the usual humour, good wishes, funny cards and thoughtful gifts, as I might have expected.

I was most interested, however, in the sentiments expressed in a card from my grandsons. The front of the card asked the question: "Grandad, has your biggest present been delivered yet?" Inside, the aforementioned grandad was at his front door for the delivery of his "biggest present" – four large boxes of candles, so large they were being carried by a forklift truck! I complained to my grandsons that the inference was that I was too old for my candles to be counted. To date, I've had no suitable reply – *or* apology! Too old to count? Well, that's as maybe. But clearly, *they're* counting my candles – and my years – more closely than I am.

There are some things that are worth counting, and some that are not. One of the most famous of the Confucian philosophers, Mencius, wrote this about himself in 300BC:

> *Mencius went to see King Huei of Liang. The king said, "Venerable sir, since you have not counted it far to come here, a distance of a thousand* li*, may I presume that you are provided with counsels to profit my kingdom?"*

The distance the philosopher had travelled mattered little to the King. There was no point in counting the *li* or the miles. What mattered was the benefit – "counsels to profit" – that Mencius brought to the kingdom.

We sing "Count your blessings, name them one by one," and, in that sense, we are giving thanks for the goodness of our God and the benefits we receive of Life and Love. But why not spend a little time today counting the "counsels to profit" that have been brought to *your* kingdom: kind acts you've known; wisdom you've gained; faith that's been strengthened; the benefits you've offered others. Worth counting? I would reckon so.

And you might even find that there are too many to count – like the candles being delivered for an old man's birthday cake!

A prayer for today

Blessings? Yes, I'll keep counting these … Amen

An original reflection © Tom Gordon *Also available at* https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com