

8th December 2023

Signals

“Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”

Bible, words of Jesus from John 4:48 (AV)

There's a scene in an episode of *Frasier* when Eddie, Frasier's father's dog, has had a veterinary procedure which means he has to wear a collar (which looks like a lampshade) to make sure the dog doesn't do damage to the wound. Eddie is a wire-haired Jack Russel. And the sight of this small dog with what looks like a large bucket on his head is *highly* amusing. Martin Crane, Frasier's father, is an inveterate TV watcher. For some reason, the TV isn't picking up the signal correctly, which means the picture is snowy. So, given that Eddie's protective collar *looks* like a TV satellite dish, the final scene finds Eddie sitting on top of the TV, with Martin adjusting his dog this way and that to pick up the best signal. If lampshade-on-head Eddie isn't funny enough, Eddie as a TV satellite dish is *absolutely* hilarious.

In 1989, I was struggling with ministry, and benefitted from a three-month spell of sabbatical leave. In an extended period of time away from work, one of the issues I identified was dealing with what I perceived to be failure: working too hard, but to little or no effect; not knowing whether my creativity was making a difference; hearing adverse voices, complaints, put-downs, so that if there were any positive noises, they were drowned out by the negativity. Looking back on it, I was at a pretty low ebb. But during that sabbatical time, the people I worked with were sensitive, insightful and supportive. In one class we were all encouraged to search for, listen to and value the small, positive voices that had been all but silenced. As we shared with each other, I was able to discern hopefulness in the midst of the negativity; hear the good through the bad; find affirmation taking the place hostility. It was a healing time, which offered me methodologies I've continued to use over the past thirty years.

At the conclusion of our class, one of my teachers said, "The deal is, you have to keep your antennae up. The signals are out there, but you have to be tuned in, to hear them through the static. Have your antennae ready, and you *will* keep hearing the positive." It was a revelation! Even now I can still see "signals and wonders". And I don't even need a dog with a lampshade as a collar that doubles as a satellite dish to help me do that.

A prayer for today

Your signals are there. Help me to be better tuned in so that I can pick them up. Amen