

22nd November 2024

Loyalty

**“All that comes from bribes or injustice will be wiped out,
but loyalty remains forever.”**

Apocrypha, “*Sirach 40:12*”

Those of you who are familiar with Scottish Presbyterianism, will know of the role of The Beadle. This was “The minister’s man” (back in the day, always a male role), a respected individual whose job was to support the minister and be available to serve, in whatever capacity, at the minister’s bidding. A good Beadle – a key figure in many Presbyterian communities – was (as one minister put it to me) “Worth his weight in gold.”

Sandy Low was this kind of Beadle, my “right-hand-man” in my parish. He organised the church for weddings, carried the bible into worship with dignity, lit the fire in my vestry on a Sunday morning, aired my robes over a chair, made sure that everything was “just so”. I trusted Sandy, one of the best people I’ve worked with. I once joked that if I asked him to turn the Communion Table up on its end with balloons tied to its legs, he would have done it. Sandy was loyal, and I valued that loyalty.

This came to mind when I heard John Bolton, National Security Advisor during Donald Trump’s first term as US President, reflect on some of the appointments Trump was making to key Government positions for his forthcoming Presidency. Some commentators were suggesting that Trump was simply rewarding loyalty. Bolton took a different view. “It’s not loyalty Trump expects,” he said. “It’s fealty.” And what is fealty? Blind, unquestioning, sycophantic, fear-based obedience – “the fidelity of a vassal or feudal tenant to his lord.” *This*, Bolton affirms, is what Trump is rewarding – and expects to continue.

Sandy Low was a good, loyal Beadle. But he showed no fealty to me, nor would I have expected that. If I *had* asked him to do my bidding with an up-ended Communion Table festooned with balloons, he would have questioned that, stated his position, offered the views of others. And *only* when he felt it was for the good of all would he have acquiesced.

Loyalty? Let’s expect it and reward it. Fealty? Let’s confine it to a less enlightened age. And, as a Scottish Beadle showed me, and John Bolton has stated so well, let’s be clear about the difference between the two.

A prayer for today

My prayer, Lord? That all injustices be wiped out and that loyalty triumphs.

My commitment, Lord? I will work hard to put my prayers into action. Amen