

23rd July 2025

Awareness

**"The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness.
[We] are all part of one another, and all involved in one another."**

Thomas Merton, *final address, "East-West monastic dialogue", 1968*

Having returned from holiday, we've been faced with the news that a key figure in our worshipping Christian community has died. I can't write about that yet, as the impact of it on me and others will take time to process. But, suffice to say, the supportive fellowship which I touched on yesterday will continue to be very important. So, here's a thought ...

I was having lunch in a café in Castleton in Derbyshire, and it was clear that several schools had brought groups of young people on end-of-the-school-year fieldtrips. Several parties came and went – for a lunch, toilet-break, short rest, new instructions, or quick "headcount". On a showery day, teachers bustled around. Some kids looked bedraggled; many chatted to each other; others sat quietly; a few cavorted about.

A group of eleven-year-olds arrived, and one girl, her face almost hidden by a hoodie, flopped down on a bench, dropped her head into her hands and started to sob. The sobbing had lasted a few minutes when another girl came and stood beside her. Saying nothing, she quietly placed her hand on the sobbing child's shoulder and started to stroke her gently. Shoulder; upper-back; shoulder; nape-of-the-neck; shoulder; hoodie; shoulder. All the while, she never spoke, but, with unfailing awareness, she continued to comfort her friend. In time, the sobbing stopped, but the comfort didn't. It continued while the seated girl dried her eyes. It continued while the party prepared to move off. I suspect it continued for the rest of the day – and not a word was exchanged.

In our congregation's grief at the loss of a loved one, many will drop their heads into their hands and sob. I will be one of those. And what do we need at that moment? Someone who, like a sensitive eleven-year-old classmate with Merton's "keen awareness", will come close, not to be clever or strong, not to give answers or even to speak – but to be there ...

Being there for each other will be comfort enough – outside a café in Castleton among a group of kids on a wet Friday, and in the pews of our church on a Sunday morning, among *all* the sobbing children of God.

A prayer for today

Loving God, thank you for your children who will be there for others in their needs. Amen