

31<sup>st</sup> January 2026

## Contentment

**“Little I ask; my wants are few;  
I only wish a hut of stone,  
(A very plain brown stone will do)  
That I may call my own;  
And close at hand is such a one  
In yonder street that fronts the sun.”**

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., *Contentment*

My reference recently to *If wishes were fishes* by the singer-songwriter Eric Bogle, began a train thought about wishes. Are we not all prone to give ourselves to wishes, hopes and dreams, from time to time?

In the turmoil of our world, we have legitimate wishes – for peace and harmony, the alleviation of poverty, environmental justice. We can work towards the fulfilment of these – campaigning, binding with others of like mind, challenging our politicians. But many will remain beyond our control, even though we try never to become complacent.

We also have desires that will never be fulfilled – that a loved one hadn't died, disasters won't happen anymore, we'll never be ill. As we process these never-to-be-fulfilled hopes, they are seen for what they are, a natural yearning to be free from pain and sorrow, for life to be perfect.

And there are selfish wishes – for more money, greater influence, perfect children. And, indeed, are we not sometimes jealous of those who have these things when we don't, emphasising our cravings all the more?

However ... might there not be “close at hand” – as Oliver Wendell Holmes would have it – that which gives us fulfilment when our wished-for-things remain out of reach? Isn't it possible to find pleasure in what we already know, and not always be stymied by unfulfilled dreams? Might there not be a call to contentment when our wishes run away with us?

In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Philippians, St Paul writes this:

*I rejoiced greatly that you renewed your concern for me. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*

Wishes? Fine! Contentment when we can get it? Even better.

### **A prayer for today**

*“The secret of being content”? I pray that it won't be a secret for long. Amen.*