

11th April 2026

Needs

"As human beings, we are part of the whole stream of life."

Rachel Carson, *Lost Woods*"

Recalling the gallery in Viewforth Church yesterday with its imperfect carved flower, I also remembered another imperfection during my ministry there – and an amusing one this time ... Viewforth was a Free Church building, constructed just after the 1843 Disruption. In familiar Free Church style, it had a large, central pulpit, accessed by steps on either side, easily seen from the "body of the kirk" and the three-sided gallery. Below the pulpit was a Communion Table, and between them was a large "organ pit", the organ being a later addition to this fine building.

Matt, my organist for a time, was a High School music teacher and a talented musician. One Sunday, I'd gone up into pulpit during the hymn before the sermon and given out my text, when I saw Matt leave the organ pit and exit through a door behind the pulpit. "Toilet, or dicky tummy", I reckoned. I never gave it much thought – until I was nearing the end of my sermon, and there was still no sign of my organist. I could feel a panic mounting. No sign of Matt. I slowed down my pace. Still no sign. I was contemplating adding a bit of waffle – even more than usual – when I saw Matt sneaking back, carrying a blue plastic bag. Seconds later, with the sermon concluded, the organ voluntary was duly played, and the service was concluded with the final hymn and the Benediction. All was well.

When worship was over, I enquired after Matt's welfare. Toilet? Bowel problems? "Oh, no," he said. "I'm fine. But, when I knew you were to preach on the feeding of the 5000, I suddenly remembered I had no milk and bread in the house, so I nipped to the corner-shop to do the necessary. I figured I had fifteen minutes – you're never longer – and provided the shop was quiet, I knew I'd be back in time."

I suggested that it would benefit my stress levels if he didn't cause me this much anxiety again, though I did leave the church with a smile. A good story to tell? Yes, indeed. But might it not also have been a metaphor for what worship should be, remembering the needs of human beings – "the whole stream of life" – even if an organist's immediate human needs could be carried in a blue plastic bag from the corner grocers?

A prayer for today

"Give us this day our daily bread", even if we have to buy it at the corner shop!