

Tending and caring for each other

Much of the Christian faith is what might be described as ‘sanctified common sense’ – and much that is common sense comes from our observation of nature. Our first reading gives an example of this, with a gardening theme. Taken from the Old Testament, it takes as its theme the joy that comes from tending and caring something. This joy and fulfilment is found not in the end product, but in the very activity of doing that tending and caring. In the six months since we moved in to the Rectory we have started to wage war on the garden. After almost eighteen months the garden had got quite a bit of a head-start on us, and we have spent quite some time trying to remove brambles and eradicate weeds. However, six months of fitful tending and caring (with the occasional binge attack on the brambles) has made a surprisingly small dent in the garden – after only a few days the weeds start to pop up again and the cycle restarts. (And our assault on the back garden has not yet had the chance to advance as far as the front of the house!) Here, for me, is practical evidence of the wisdom that we find in that reading from the Bible – that it is the tending and the caring that must matter – for the progress on the ground sometimes seems truly minimal.

So often we are asked to focus ourselves on an end result – whether it is the profitability of a business, the return a bank gets on its investments, the salary we get paid for our job, or the results that we get after taking our exams. But here ‘common sense made holy’ suggests that we look not just at that end result, but at the very way that we ourselves grow on the way there. Be careful to hear that I am no saying that these end results are not important:

- without a business being profitable it will not continue to exist – but are profits the only thing to consider when running a business?
- a bank that gives no return on investments will soon find that it is no longer a bank – but is there a longer term view to be had than just making money as quickly as possible?
- without being paid we clearly have problems fulfilling our basic needs – but might fulfilment and happiness be more important than the paycheque at the end of the month.
- without qualifications our opportunities in life are limited – but if we only learnt how to pass the exam, will we truly have an advantage over the person who learnt to love the subject they studied?

For me the clear answer to all of this is that it does truly matter not only what the end result of something is, but also how we get there. And this is something that we can apply to life in general – how we live our lives is as important as what we end up with at the end of our lives.

The Christian faith is centred on an understanding of the importance of giving of ourselves to others – a love that triumphs over hate. This is a love that reflects the example of Jesus – an example that took him to give his own life for the life of others. This is seen lived out in the pages of scripture where we find again and again the challenge to tend and transform each other – that caring for each other we will be more fulfilled than serving our own interests alone. If we live this out in our own lives then day-by-day we will grow more closely to each other, and reveal amongst us a love and a care for each other that can transform all of us – and then we will have an end result worth having.