

Care and Bear

As I sit to write this lead article in early June, the Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend is fresh in my mind and especially the video the Queen made, back in March, with Paddington Bear, ‘Ma’amalade sandwich, Your Majesty?’. For those who missed it, it can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UfiCa244XE>. The Queen is entertaining Paddington Bear to afternoon tea in Buckingham Palace and reveals that, like Paddington, she is partial to a marmalade sandwich, which she keeps in her handbag rather than inside her hat as he does. As a parable, this short video is very profound. Paddington is very different from the Queen, from a very different social class, an orphaned refugee from overseas with very different table manners and ursine rather than human; the contrast could not be greater. The emphasis, though, is what they have in common, not what divides them.

Time and again in the gospels, Jesus emphasises that, essentially, we are all very similar under the skin. It is an ‘accident’ of birth that I was born male rather than female and without an extra or missing sex chromosome. I was born and raised in Stockport, not Stryi or St Petersburg, speaking English not Ukrainian or Russian. I was a medical scientist, not a road sweeper or an oligarch.

Of course, one of the original things about Paddington is that he was left at Paddington station after travelling from Peru with a label on him, “Please look after this bear”. In recent times, I have seen captions of him in different contexts. One was when his label had fallen off and on his suitcase was written the words “Rwanda”. And we are reminded that many people fleeing war-torn areas, personal danger, natural disaster and other situations come, so to speak, with the label, “Please look after me”. Jesus and his family wore that label when they fled to Egypt, when Jesus was a toddler, because of when and where He was born.

We know the issues are complex and resources are sometimes limited, but also we are reminded what it means to live in connection to each other, to recognise our common humanity, to realise how we would like to be treated if we were in a strange land with no sense of what may happen to us.

We have seen the huge surge of good will to Ukrainian families, and it has been heartening to see how communities rally together for the good to do what can be done to provide a sustained welcome and assistance for both humans and members of other species, be they pets, zoo or farm animals or injured or traumatised wildlife.

When we realise our own vulnerability, we may sense that we all wear the label “Please look after me”, to some degree. We all need some care and support, even as we can offer that to others.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (Hebrews 13:2)

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for those who look after me, and offer care, time and attention. Help me to show care and welcome to others whenever I can.

Roger Newton