

RECTOR'S PINT

I was given a wonderful little book for Christmas 'Tales of a Country Parish'.

It is a beautifully written book, a series of daily reflections written by the Vicar of Savernake Forest throughout 2020, to stay in touch with his parishioners during the Pandemic. Reading it did make me feel a little inadequate, I find coming up with a suitable theme once a month for these pints enough of a challenge! But Colin Hever-Percy, when he is not being a vicar of four rural parishes in Wiltshire is a professional script writer, so I have forgiven myself for my lack of literary output!

He reflects on a sense of place, and the people who live there, and he brings a deep learning to his reflections, of philosophy, country lore, music of all kinds and a deep knowledge and application of the Bible and his own understanding of the Christian faith, it is a delightful read.

Quite early in the book he writes something that really grabbed my attention. He talks about the incident when Jesus returns briefly to his hometown of Nazareth, where "he could do no deed of power there" (Mark 6:5). He was the Carpenter's son, the people there don't need to believe in him, they assume they knew him.....The people he is able to help need him, they can't afford to question him or dismiss him..... Faith is much closer to needing than knowing. At first glance this seems to put the religious believer fundamentally at odds with the scientist, but actually it draws them closer together. Like scientists, Christians are devoted to pursuing what they don't know. So, St Augustine warns us, 'If you understand it, it's not God'".

I really like that sense of faith described as need. Some might see need as a weakness. But we all have needs and I reflect that Jesus talked in terms of needs being met in him. For instance, in the beatitudes, a part of the wider sermon on the Mount, he tells his listeners "Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 3:1), which could be understood as meaning blessed are those who know their need of God. In John's gospel he is recorded as saying "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6: 25). Relationally, few people would have the personal resources to survive, let alone thrive, if they were living an existence of total isolation, there is something fundamental in the need for relationship and the lack of this and the loneliness that results is a real problem in our modern theoretically inter - connected world.

Paradoxically I know that I am most spiritually alive when I am aware of a deep hunger and thirst, when I know my need for God, and I am spiritually dead when I ignore that need. So here, at the beginning of a New Year (which is when I write this) I have a single, simple prayer, 'Lord, may my need for you increase, satisfy that need in the year ahead.' Amen.

Simon