

The Vicarage,
Bryнна Road
Llanharen
CF72 9QE
curateofradyr@gmail.com
01443 286674 or 07734 248869

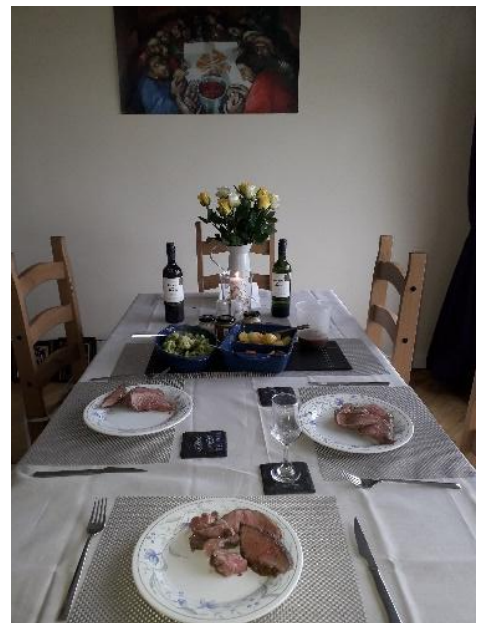
Dear Friends,

*“Yes we have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body
and at home with the Lord” 2 Corinthians 5 v 6-10 14-17*

Do you, like me, sometimes dread that question you get asked every day – “What’s for tea tonight”? Although I don’t think that I am a bad cook and I quite enjoy cooking I, like most parents, get a bit bored with trying to think up new ideas, especially when we are juggling work and home life. For years I have cooked for my boys. Having a takeaway once a week, not because we particularly like takeaway food, but it gave me a break from cooking. Over the years I have taught them both the basic cooking skills, and as they have got older, we have shared the planning preparation and cooking between us.

One of the things I and my son William have really appreciated over the last few weeks is that we haven’t had to cook an evening meal! We have enjoyed Simon being at home, doing the cooking and have benefited from his attendance at catering college in his younger days. Our waistlines have most certainly increased, but luckily the leisure centres are now up and running again!

Most evenings we have been able to share a meal together, something enjoyed by many. This gave us the opportunity to talk and discover new things about each other. I have found myself listening to some interesting discussions about life between Simon and William, one of which was all about what it means to be happy. I don’t think I am alone when I say that this is something that most parents hope for their children, to be happy and healthy. But I was taken aback by some of my son’s ideals. The most important thing he said was ‘being successful in life’. This he suggested would be the way to happiness. I couldn’t help but think, where did he get this idea from?



The next morning Simon and I faced the three hour drive to Shropshire to inter his mum’s ashes. Again, I was thankful that Simon opted to drive. He decided to listen to an audio book to pass the time and, when I saw the title, I have to confess my heart sank a little. This wasn’t going to be easy listening. In fact, if I saw it on a bookshelf, I would pass it by.

The full title of the book was the ‘*The Tyranny of Meritocracy. What’s become of the common good?*’ by Michael Sandal, a politician, historian and philosopher. The ‘common good’; now there’s a phrase we all know and recognise from our prayers. Maybe this may not be as bad as I thought, and they say you should never judge a book by its cover, so I listened intently.

Our readings today speak of seeing things differently and not judging on outward appearances, something which isn’t always that easy. Quite simply, things are not always as they seem. Paul speaks to the confident church of Corinth, suggesting they walk by faith not by sight. Paul mentions frequently living, not by the flesh or in the body or by worldly standards, but suggesting that the believers are dead to these and are now in a new creation in Christ. Paul’s letter reflects the differences between how things appear in the world and how things are in Christ. For Paul, the reconciling action of the cross results in a change of perception which transforms us from the inside out. We say, don’t we, it’s what’s on the inside that counts not the outside?

Mark's Gospel highlights the contrast between reality and appearance. We hear the familiar parable of the mustard seed. The small humble seed which has the ability to grow beyond all expectation. Jesus speaks in parables to challenge the conventional way of thinking, to try to help us to see things through the eyes of Jesus. The scripture constantly reminds us of God's sovereign rule and His faithful promise. It's not about us, how successful we think we are. God's reign isn't dependant on the best efforts for ourselves; this frees us from the worldly burden of success and the damaging ideas of failure.

Although the book we listened to was mostly full of references to America, it made some relevant points. It criticises the dualistic thought process that leads us to make assumptions and rash judgments. It suggests that the Ideal of merit, or meritocracy, has meant the fabric of society has become unravelled, as it promises self-mastery and self-making – ideas which don't sit with our Christian faith at all. But the question the author was seeking to answer was this. Do we as a society work on a merit basis or do we seek the common good? Now there's a question!

The book suggests to me that a merit system is unhealthy. It's an attempt to escape from the things that weigh us down rather than putting them right and that focusing on the rising to the top can do little to cultivate, or grow, the social bonds that we need for everyone to flourish. I wonder what success means to you? What does happiness look like? What do we strive for? And does success drive us apart rather than unite us? It all depends on your definition I suppose.

As I listened to the chapters, speaking of winners and losers, great being seen as good, the promotion of competition and the secular ideal of success, I realised that this is out there in our society and we are all exposed to it. You may say well that's obvious, but it is good to remind ourselves of this. As I reflected on the piece, I could see how my son has been influenced by all these ideals and had brought him to this conclusion, that success is everything and failure isn't an option. I look forward to revisiting that discussion when William has read the book!

Love in Christ

Belinda

