

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022

I was sorry to hear that the veteran actress, June Brown, had passed away this week, aged 95. I listened to a tribute to her life on the BBC and she confessed that it was as the character, Dot Cotton, in the BBC Soap Opera, “Eastenders”, that she had become a household name, since her first appearance in 1985. Thirty-seven years on our screens! I suppose that is nothing compared to William Roache, who has been in ITV’s “Coronation Street” as Ken Barlow since its very first episode in 1960. That is quite a remarkable feat indeed.

Whether you like soap operas, or dislike, detest and despise them, you probably recognise their names. Let’s see – there’s “Emmerdale”, “Hollyoaks”, “Neighbours” (soon to be no more!”); “Casualty”; “Coronation Street”; “Eastenders”, and the one that always has me cringing if I accidentally tune in, “River City”!

Then, there is the Grandpa of them all, “The Archers”!

If you are old enough, like me, you will remember, “Emergency Ward 10” and “Crossroads”! I can actually remember my Mum listening into what was perhaps one of the earliest soaps on the radio, “Life with the Lyons”. If you remember that, then you are as ancient as I am!

In her later years, Mum was an avid fan of “Emmerdale”, but she became more and more disillusioned as the plots became so outrageous – no wedding ever seems to proceed without someone standing up and objecting that the bride’s really in love with the best man; or his sister; or the bloke in the café – pretty much everyone apart from the groom; or just as they are about to make their vows someone else barges through the church door and shouts that the groom is a) already married b) a murderer c) actually the bride’s long lost half-sister!

There is more life drama in a single episode of so many of the Soaps than the average three score years and ten!

Now I have to admit that I am not a soap opera fan, but I have nothing against those who are, but I am not one of them.

Why?

Well, the reason is very simple – as an average British male, my life span is somewhere around 81. From what I can see, 81 years is not long enough for the soap opera writers to finish a plot – and I don’t want to shuffle off this mortal coil without tying up as many loose ends as is possible.

When God sends for me, I don’t want to say, “Sorry, Lord, I can’t go just now...I’ve got to wait and find out whether Cliff is going to be truthful with Gillian who is pretending to be carrying Jim’s best friend’s hairdresser’s baby. I don’t want to have to wait and find out if Mary is going to get together with Martin and get away from Marjorie and her children, Mabel, Madeline and Madison.

No, I don’t watch soap operas.

I like to know how things are going to turn out, and I have yet to see a soap opera that is ready to give me that information.

All of us want to know how things turn out.

Can you imagine the film “Titanic” finishing with Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslett jumping into the freezing Atlantic ocean? We want to know how it turns out for them.

Do they live; do they perish?

Or in one of my all-time favourites, “The Shawshank Redemption”, does Andy Dufresne, wrongly imprisoned for the murder of his wife and her lover, and making his fantastic escape from prison, manage to avoid detection or do the authorities eventually catch up with him?

Is there anything more unsatisfying than watching a football match that ends in a draw? We want to know who is the best team. We want to know how the story ends.

You know, that is exactly the way I feel about so many of the stories in the Gospels which seem to end abruptly - I’ve found myself asking, “And then what?”

I really wish that one of the Gospel writers had told us what happened to Jesus’ stepfather, Joseph.

What happened to the Wise Men when they returned to their homelands?

What happened to the young boy who gave Jesus his picnic lunch that day at the Lakeside and Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the multitude? Did he grow up to be a follower of the Carpenter of Nazareth?

What happened to Pontius Pilate? Did he return to Rome and often think about the itinerant preacher whom he sentenced to death?

I know that I am being very inquisitive, but I would really like to know!

This Sunday is Palm Sunday, the start of the holiest week in the Christian calendar. We know Jesus’ movements every day this coming week, right up to the Passover Meal and the arrest and the mock trial and the scourging and the Crucifixion on Friday. We follow Jesus’ steps along the way to Calvary.

And we are not left in the dark. We do know the denouement of the story – before the week was out, Jesus would show the completeness of the Father’s compassion, the greatness of His grace, as He, who had never committed a sin, who had never broken a commandment, would willingly die an ignominious and painful death on a Roman instrument of torture.

Our Saviour would willingly shoulder the sins of every human this world has produced – every curse, every lie, every bit of envy, every hatred. Each of those Jesus carried and millions more. Every hurt that has ever been inflicted, every pain we have produced, Jesus saw and carried to the Cross.

As the hymn says, “Bearing shame and scoffing rude,

In my place, condemned He stood;

Sealed my pardon with His blood –

Hallelujah, what a Saviour!”

So, Friends, even if your life at this moment is filled with all the sadness, sorrow and suffering of a soap opera, I want you to know the end of the story.

God says to you, as He once said to the Prophet Isaiah, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you: I have called you by your name, you are Mine.”

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister