

Mid-Week Reflection 12 August 2020



By Andrew Carr, Reader, St Edmund & St Alban Dartford

The image above is taken from the film JOKER (2019). It shows the titular character portrayed by Joaquin Phoenix who won an Oscar (rightly) for his disturbing but absorbing performance. Having not seen the film at the cinema, I got to see it on tv a few days back. The character was drawn from the DC comic stable as an adversary of Batman and has also been portrayed on screen by actors such as Jack Nicholson (1989) and the late Heath Ledger (2008) who again won an Oscar (rightly) for his intense interpretation...

As someone with mental health issues employed as a clown/entertainer and who tries his luck as a stand-up comedian only to lose the former role (in which he found some stability and solace) and be ridiculed on a popular tv show for the latter, Joker descends into madness and violence which, in one instance, saves someone else from being assaulted.

So why choose this character for a midweek reflection..?

Because the 'mask', the face paint, Joker (real name Arthur Fleck) wears, hiding his true pitiable nature, is visible to the world around him in the fictional city of Gotham (New York in reality), whereas everyone else's is invisible. Near the beginning of the film we see him and fellow clowns doing makeup, putting on costumes; written on his makeup mirror is the phrase *'Put on a Happy Face!'*

Do we put on a “happy” face..? Do we hide behind “I’m fine thanks” (especially when nothing could be further from the truth) when asked how we’re doing..? As the American poet Thoreau once wrote: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation...”

And it’s this I’d like to reflect briefly upon.

In our present society we can be depersonalised – all passwords and pin numbers, entries on spreadsheets – and despite living in an age of near instantaneous communication – disconnected. Often people complain of being ‘lost in a crowd’ or being little more than ‘your call is important to us’ as you wait in a queue listening to muzak.... This lostness, disconnection, insecurity is seemingly on the rise. Yet “I’m fine thanks”...

In our present society we can often fear an impersonal death, in which we are not in control but are swept along by the chain of events. It is this sense of helplessness that make us cling to material things, to the cult of youth and health – for example so many tv adverts tell of cremes that reduce signs of ageing..? Yet “I’m fine thanks”...

In our present society we can often fear an impersonal life. Loneliness is the worst of human sufferings. Life is meaningless (per a theme of the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament) and endless drudgery if there is no-one to relate to and to live for. Sadly, relationships with people are often too transient to depend on. We have lost a sense of community. Yet “I’m fine thanks”...

I hope that reading this you would feel able to speak to those in St Edmunds and St Albans in leadership, who will listen and pray with and for you, if any of the above strikes a chord... In these pandemic days, an arms-length ear and/or a socially-distanced shoulder are available within our church community.

Jesus says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
(Matthew 11:28)

I hope too that reading this you would come to Jesus and find His rest which is offered to all who are broken - and we all are.

The rest He promises is love, healing and peace with God. In that is the comfort and belonging we seek, a comfort and belonging the world or ‘...anything else in all creation...’ cannot give. The rest Jesus gives is unlike any other, reaching to the depths of our heart and soul. While the world constantly demands conformity from us, and sells us stuff that promises to help us be so... Jesus calls us, you, me to come and rest to stay in His unchanging presence.

We no longer have to strive to conform or to hide our true selves because Jesus gave His life so that we could be set free from the world’s conformity, and experience the deep and genuine love He has for us all as we, you, me are. He takes us, you, me as we are, accepts us for who we, you, me are. We gain spiritual rest as well as an eternal rest spent in the presence of God, starting with Jesus’ peace.

AMEN