

Rendezvous Sunday – Feb 28, 2010

This is Rendezvous, a time to kick up our heels a little, to enjoy the returning of the light and the promise of spring, a time to remember and to honour the people who came before us.

We do love the old, familiar tunes and old familiar words. Though indeed these may no longer be familiar to many of us. Hymns from the past. They comfort, uplift, reassure.

It is interesting to look back and compare.

It's easy to romanticise the past.

I'm a fan of Jane Austen. It's very appealing to imagine living in a mansion. If you are the wealthy owners that is. If you are one of the servants – expect to work from 6 am till 11 pm 30 days a month. And even being mistress of Pemberley would pall the moment you got a toothache. Let alone appendicitis.

It's easy to romanticise. It's also easy to condemn the past, to patronise our forebears.

We know so much more now. *We* are so much more enlightened. We see very clearly all that was wrong in our great-grandparents' society and wonder that they did not perceive it. We see less clearly what is wrong in our own society. I really wonder - what will our great-grandchildren see as our blind spots, and wonder that we could not see?

Looking back, we see the injustice, the patronizing attitude that classed women as children, deemed forever incompetent to make decisions and choose for themselves (though women were certainly deemed competent to do a vast amount of manual labour). We overlook that this could sometimes mask a deep, cherishing, respectful love.

We see the injustice of the class system, that by accident of birth one was forever assigned a position in society, high or low. Ambition was suspect – is that rebellion against the ordinance of God who decreed your station? “Knowing your place” was a virtue.

We revel in individual freedom. And I do think that is good. But we can forget how much misery naked individual greed (ambition is a much nicer word, isn't it?) can cause. We forget that we are called to be fundamentally content, not to be forever in search of more and newer and bigger and better.

Much has changed in the last century or so. Some changes are for the good, some for the bad, much has just changed.

Dress has changed. And me, I GREATLY prefer modern dress. My Mum has a “walking dress” that belonged to her mother, so probably from the early 1900s. It weighs a ton. Ladies – you look wonderful. Are you comfortable? Does your dress help or hinder you in normal life? Mind you – how do modern women move in the latest high heels?

Gentlemen too – do you really want to go back to scratchy woollen underwear and hugely heavy greatcoats and a cut-throat razor to shave with?

But we do sigh for the good old days – when things were simpler, people were kinder, faith was deeper, life was slower, everyone was happy, there was no crime, no drugs, no divorce, etc etc.

There is some truth in some of it.

It seems there really was very little crime in the Yukon in the early 1900s. But then there were other places like Skagway where crime was rampant.

Old timers talk of when everyone left their doors unlocked. Now there are huge notices in the Canada Games Centre changing rooms “High theft area”. The simple commandment, “Thou shalt not steal” seems to no longer be widely observed.

But on the other hand - domestic violence is certainly still with us but we no longer believe that a man has the God-given right to hit his wife if he feels like it. Drunk driving is still with us, but less acceptable. We are far more aware of the evils of bullying and racism and intolerance.

Were people happier? I’m not sure. There was certainly less encouragement to complain! Modern culture positively encourages unhappiness, then tries to sell us stuff to cure our unhappiness. I suspect that most people had more to be unhappy about a hundred years ago. But did they cope better?

I was very interested when my Mum was reminiscing about World War II. She was a young woman living in London through the Blitz. She spoke of the rationing and the bombing and the evacuation and the difficulties of trying to just carry on with life. But then she says, you must remember this was a happy time. Everyone pulled together, there was lots of laughter, we made do and it was fun.

And then she sighed and said, Britain could not do that now.

Was faith deeper in the old days? Well, all respectable people went to church every Sunday. Absolutely. Did everyone have strong faith? I’m honestly not sure. Respectability could cover a lot. Some did for sure. Certainly people knew far more about the Bible and the Christian faith, it was actively taught in every school and every church and most homes.

Today? Well, the good thing is - you are here today because you choose to be, not because society expects it of you, not because your job requires your faithful weekly attendance. There are many other things you could be doing this morning. But you chose to come here. So did everyone around you. I hope you find God here.

Were people kinder in the old days? I don’t know. Some were very kind, very generous. Others were not. There was at least one Scrooge to be found in most places! Some people today are very kind, very generous. Others are not.

I'm inclined to think as I discussed with the children – the stuff has changed. Customs have changed. The people haven't changed all that much.

God hasn't changed. Perhaps our understanding of God is a bit different, but we still worship the same God that our ancestors worshipped. We still pray to the same God even if we use different words. We still sing hymns of praise even if as my Dad used to say, "The tunes is wrong!" And God still hears us. God still answers us, cares for us. And God still walks with us through all our modern life brings.

Thanks be to God. Amen.