

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11.28

When the going gets tough, it can be vital to know that you have a safe space, to which you can retire. It is bad enough to feel overwhelmed; but to feel overwhelmed without knowing that there is a place in which you will find rest, can be too much. So, I was delighted to visit Oakleaf Enterprise recently, a charity in the centre of Guildford that provides support for those with mental health difficulties. They offer a range of support, from helping people back into employment, to counselling, to learning IT skills. One of their recent ventures is to provide ‘Safe Haven’. This is a drop-in place, on Walnut Tree Close, which is available for anyone, 18.00 – 23.00, 365 days a year. No need for a referral; no questions asked. If you call in, you will receive a safe, calm and friendly welcome, and meet wise people who will listen, care and guide.

Perhaps we owe it to ourselves, during the summer months, to remind ourselves where we can find a few safe havens. This can be awarding ourselves permission and time to enjoy music or reading, or the delight in doing nothing. It can involve reconnecting with friends, when there is nothing urgent to talk about – but ensuring that strong friendships are there, as/when they are particularly needed. I imagine that each of us knows what our safe spaces are – but making sure that we are familiar with going there is important. At Oakleaf, I was especially impressed that no referrals are needed; no judgement is made as to whether you deserve this, or whether you are ill enough to merit it. Just turn up, spend time in safety, and then depart stronger. A haven is a place close to heaven.

JF Kennedy kept the opening lines of this poem, inscribed on a piece of wood, on his desk throughout his presidency.

Thy sea, O God, so great,
My boat so small.
It cannot be that any happy fate
Will me befall
Save as Thy goodness opens paths for me
Through the consuming vastness of the sea.

Thy winds, O God, so strong,
So slight my sail.
How could I curb and bit them on the long
And saltry trail,
Unless Thy love were mightier than the wrath
Of all the tempests that beset my path?

Thy world, O God, so fierce,
And I so frail.
Yet, though its arrows threaten oft to pierce
My fragile mail,
Cities of refuge rise where dangers cease,
Sweet silences abound, and all is peace.

by Winfred Ernest Garrison

So, although the sea is great, the winds may be strong and the world appear to be fierce, God promises that we are not alone. God's love accompanies us each day. That is often made most visible through acts of kindness, quiet companionship offered by sensitive people. We can offer this to others. We also need to be people who can accept kindness, and make use of a haven when it presents itself.

Best wishes

Robert