

## Grace Notes in Miniature

Friday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear Friends:

This morning, when the alarm awoke me, I became aware that it had snowed a bit overnight – albeit not very much, and it dissipated pretty quickly, but it didn't do an awful lot to brighten a day that was already overcast. I started thinking about the logistics of getting snow tires on my car, and then drifted to thinking about those who don't have the benefit of a closed car with a heater and seat warmer. There are a number of Mennonite families in the area where I live and some are "Old-Order", who do not own cars, choosing the simplicity of a horse and buggy. I cannot imagine that it is very warm even in one of the box-type horse-drawn vehicles one often sees, and it humbles me to think about the modern conveniences people may eschew because of their commitment to faith. Especially at a time like this where many of us are able to participate in practising our faith at a distance with the help of technology, A friend, who is a priest in a mission in African, told us about the three-hour walk many of their parishioners make each way every Sunday in all weather in order to be present at Mass; then I felt guilty about the times I may have been tempted to stay in bed! Knowing that people walking long journeys like that often like to sing, I started thinking of the "Psalms of Ascent" which are believed to reflect the Jewish People's journey toward the Temple in Jerusalem. This psalm(121) is almost as well-known to me as Psalm 23 and I offer it to you in a contemporary recording:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kESe\\_oPXms](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kESe_oPXms)

My next thoughts were about the realisation that the clocks will change between going to bed on Saturday evening and arising on Sunday morning and I had to rehearse in my mind the little mnemonic I learned as a child (spring forward and



then fall backward) to be reassured that I was going to gain – not lose – an hour's sleep! An hour. Apart from knowing that this is a marker between summer and winter, what does it mean to us to be given this gift of an hour? Of course, I recognise that we'll pay for it in the spring but that is far enough away....



For someone who struggles to get enough sleep, this is precious rest time; for a night-shift worker, it may mean an extra hour of pay as we head into winter with the need to buy some warm clothing. And, for a short time at least, it means getting up in light instead of darkness. Or one could get up at the time one's body usually wakes and see the hour as additional time in the day.

An hour: precious time to a new mother who gets an extra hour of respite from her colicky baby, to a condemned prisoner waiting for a last-minute reprieve on deathrow, to Jesus – who asked his friends as they slept at Gethsemane, “could you not watch one hour with me?”(Matt 26:40) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCr2tn4YKY>



An hour spent visiting – whether in person, through a window or on-line – with an older relative who is denied visits right now due to Covid, or playing with a small child who is disconsolate over not being able to see friends, or family members who do not share the same house-bubble, can seem like a great gift.

And, although we have to observe many restrictions, it's hard to forget that it is All Hallows' Eve, Hallowe'en, this weekend. Much as Mardi Gras is a fun-filled antecedent to Ash Wednesday, Hallowe'en is the lead into the Memorial of All Saints Day , followed the next day by All Souls. In some cultures, Hallowe'en is marked with special foods, such as a soul (or soal) cake (UK) – perhaps the precursor of “trick-or-treat – which was given to beggars on this day. Here are two versions of an old song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu8H5rA9HuA> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nABowLcQIHc> for you to enjoy. Contrary to some concerns, it did start out as a Christian observance although some scholars believe it was the syncretisation of the Christian “All Hallows' Eve with the old Celtic festival of Samhain – Scots Gaelic for “summer's end”; hence the traditions of dressing up, bonfires, etc. Such a day, coming halfway between the fall equinox and winter solstice, was seen as a ‘thin’ or liminal day when the barrier between this world and the Otherworld thinned and the souls of the dead could seek hospitality by revisiting their former homes. In some countries people visit cemeteries on this day to put candles on the graves of beloved antecedents. You may like to light a candle in your home and share memories of a loved family member who is no longer with you. May you enjoy this day, however you choose to spend it!

Praying that we all enjoy a grace-filled weekend,

Gillian

