

When time allowed, it was excellent during the recent Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina in Italy to be able to settle down and watch the curling. Like a great number of people, I was 'swept' up (get it?) with this event - cheering on the Great Britain men's, women's and mixed doubles curling teams, as well as enjoying a couple of matches involving other nations'.

Curling provided an absorbing tactical contest – someone referred to it as 'like chess on ice' - great feel and dexterity by whoever was delivering the stone, the occasional lift in action when stones were more forcefully removed or realigned, and the deceptively hard work of the sweepers to guide the path of a stone.

The GB men came away with silver, when they'd had high hopes of taking the gold medal - it was hard to watch the disappointment on their faces at the medal ceremony. The women's team narrowly missed out on the top four, and the medal matches, while the mixed doubles lost in the bronze medal match, to end up in the fourth place so unwanted in sport, so near and yet so far.

What the vast majority of us watching would not have seen was the many hours of practice, travelling and other competitive action that the curlers would have gone through to get to this stage. Their quality play didn't happen out of nowhere or overnight. It was the result of a great deal of effort and sacrifice to develop the skills and mental resilience to compete as they did. Armchair curlers like me only see the fruition of all that formative work between one Olympic Games and the next.

Thinking about this chimed in with what I read in an online post by the Anglican priest, theologian and retreat leader Mark Clavier in his blog called 'Well-Tempered' (found at [markclavier.substack.com](http://markclavier.substack.com)).

In the first of a series of posts on being 'Formed for Faithfulness', Mark reflects on the situation of spiritual apathy that comes when a community no longer knows what it's for and he considers the institutional fatigue being experienced by many Anglicans.

I'm one of them. I am not the biggest fan of the Church of England at present, with its internal rancour and polarisation. I'm tired. I'm feeling the weight of what seems like continuously turning the handle simply to 'keep church going'.

But I was encouraged by Mark's theme of recovering an Anglican way of life. He reminded me that I am still energised by the Anglican way of proceeding. One that doesn't rely on megabucks investment in the spectacular, the 'hot', or the high-profile.

He offers five 'guiding principles' – not a strategic blueprint or checklist. They struck a chord with me. I wonder what you make of them?

Firstly, the Anglican way is best understood as a '**formed way of life**'. It is a way that shapes us. Habit, ritual and shared practice cultivate in us attention, desire and imagination. Against today's culture of the high-speed, one-click immediacy, it is actually a strength that Anglicans travel at a deliberate pace, which should by no means be branded as being timid.

Secondly, **worship is our centre of gravity**. Common prayer is central. It shapes our devotion and focus over time, instead of through bright flashes of emotion or by the spectacular.

Liturgy quietly moulds character and teaches habits of faith, says Mark, who adds: 'When worship is reduced to an experience or a spectacle, it loses the quiet, cumulative power that can shape communities deeply in the faith.'

Third, **story and imagination give coherence to belief and practice**. We're besieged by reports, strategies and statistics. But what about meaning? What about having the imagination that lets us to see our lives as part of a larger whole. He quotes the writer Antoine Saint-Exupéry: 'If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood... but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.' The Anglican way similarly helps us develop a longing for the horizon toward which worship, prayer, and shared practice stretch us. That's how we find refreshment and renewal.

Fourth, **faith is formed in community**. Increasingly writers are highlighting a yearning for community today, rather than a privatised way of patching together the spiritual practices that we think will suit us as individuals. Instead, Mark says people grow through belonging to a parish, a people, a Body. Anglican life flourishes when 'faith is shared, practices are held in common, and burdens are borne together'.

Finally, **renewal comes through steady faithfulness**. 'Anglicanism rarely aims to dazzle,' says Mark. Instead the lingering genius of Anglicanism is in 'patience, perseverance, and humane truthfulness', often shown in consistent attention to prayer, care and shared practice. In a noisy, brash, social media age of outrage and speedy judgmentalism, fidelity (that is, faithfulness and commitment) itself becomes a quiet act of resistance.

This article may come over as the groaning of some kind of crusty traditionalist. That's not my intention. I'm absolutely not a *traditionalist* in the 'we used to do it this way so let's just go back that' sense. But I do think *tradition* can be rightly seen as a dynamic way of learning from what has gone before and considering what it may teach us about finding the way forward.

As always, I'd love to hear your responses to this.

*Fr Simon*