

Outward Appearances

1 Samuel 16:7: 'The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.'



Drawing back the curtains on Saturday morning I was disappointed to see the sky obscured by low greyish, white clouds. There had been a late frost during the night and instead of realising that the early morning sun on the frost had caused a thick mist I thought that the cloud of volcanic dust erupting from the Icelandic volcano had fallen on England during the night. How pessimistic can one get! Thankfully reassured that this was not the case we joined some of the family for a farewell breakfast and walk on the beach at Southwold, our nearest seaside resort, before our youngest daughter returned to university on the midday train. By the time we reached Southwold all the low cloud had gone. It was perfect beach weather - brilliant sunshine, no wind and cloudless blue sky.

However, all was not as it appeared to be. Because I was familiar with the News of the previous two days I knew that in the beautiful blue sky above, hidden from the naked eye, was a volcanic dust cloud whose debris was dangerous to all aircraft with jet engines. The cloud covered Britain and many European countries and for safety all the affected countries' passenger air traffic was currently grounded until further notice.

Modern technology enabled us to cap the bombed oil wells that were belching out thick plumes of acrimonious flames and smoke during the Gulf War but man cannot cap an active volcano! The pressure feeding the core of an erupting volcano has to be released until its energy has been exhausted. We were reminded of this by the President of Iceland when he said that nature will have to run its course and we with all our scientific expertise can only wait until it does so.

The cloudless blue sky was silent and empty, millions of passengers were displaced. My youngest son and his wife found themselves stranded in Spain. A traumatic end to their Easter holiday and one which I am sure they will never forget.

I thought, how easy it is to give the appearance of 'I am all right - everything is fine' when in reality the opposite is true. That deceptive front which perhaps only those closest to us can perceive! There are so many things that can cause us to put on a front. It may be as small as an unresolved niggles, or a misunderstanding. It might be difficulties or painful disputes between family, neighbours, friends or colleagues. How do we cope when the money does not seem to go round and the debts begin to mount up? When the pressure of examinations or work deadlines begin to build up and the safety valve begins to blow? Everything may seem to be getting out of hand and no matter how hard we try it never seems to be good enough! Whatever is causing the pressure, sooner or later there is bound to be a fall out which will directly or indirectly affect us or someone else.

There are no scientific instruments on those grounded, passenger airliners to identify the volcanic debris which could cause such catastrophic damage and loss of life. Aviation experts with

sophisticated equipment seeking to avoid a repeat of an air crash a few years ago have investigated the present situation. They would be as irresponsible not to do their job properly and give direction as we would be to ignore their conclusions and advice. The same can be true of us when we ignore our retreat into silence or inactivity.

Isn't it better to be transparent than to cover up? Maybe you have had someone say ' If only you had let us know, we would have been there for you, or we would have done everything we could to help you,' or ' that is what friends are for,' or 'of course we will stand with you - we are your family'. I know that God knows me well and so do those who are closest to me so there really is no point in trying to 'go it alone'. Putting it differently - there is nothing I can hide from God for He sees all, whereas I can try to cover up with the family but as they know me rather well I don't get away with it for long! Sometimes there is only God to appeal to in our distress. Just as the problem in our skies had enormous consequences so too can neglected pressure in our lives. We can, with God's grace, and good communication, give ourselves the opportunity to handle life's pressures differently with more favourable outcomes and less collateral damage.

Hebrews 4:16 'Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.'

Galatians 6:2: 'Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.'