

Not all is what it seems



Not all is what it seems. Recent anxieties about Artificial Intelligence have brought to the surface the need to question what at first appears to be original thought but on further investigation reveals to be a construction of words cobbled together to look like something that in fact it is not. It is now possible for an essay or sermon(!) on any given topic to be produced in any particular style in a matter of seconds. Those who teach and who work in academia must now be more vigilant in spotting the fake from the real – and that is more of a challenge than ever before. Did the student really write this? Caution, suspicion, and the need to be vigilant against falsehood have taken on a whole new meaning when it comes to Artificial Intelligence and the impact it has on our everyday lives.

The recent discovery of new fragments of medieval wall paintings in the recently restored and redecorated Mortuary Chapel at St Peter's in Benington has raised tantalizing questions about what lies underneath the whitewashed plaster. Evidence of wall paintings, dating back to the C14th, were uncovered many years ago at the west end. The recent discoveries raise the question of whether the whole of the Church was once decorated, in pre-Reformation times, possibly with the same floral pattern as revealed at the far end of the nave. Was what is now a plain white interior once a wild splash of reds and

browns celebrating God's creation on every wall? The whitewashed surfaces are not all that they seem.

Over thirty years a parish priest has taught me that people too are often not what they first might seem. The experience of bereavement often reveals whose one's true friends are. Sometimes those who you were most expecting to be around to support fail to appear whilst those whom you least expected to give a shoulder to lean on show loyalty and kindness beyond measure. There is no telling, though our common life together means we know what it is to be disappointed by some and equally, pleasantly surprised by others. It is best not to rush to judgement when it comes to people. Different circumstances bring to the surface what our characters are really made of. Though made in the image of God, we all have the potential to fail each other – but also, we have the potential to succeed in our loving of one another too.

If Artificial Intelligence raises anxiety and suspicion then the question of how we resettle and reintegrate offenders back into society, particularly those who have committed serious crimes, understandably raises anxiety and suspicion even more so. Is it possible for someone who has committed a grievous offence to be reformed in such a way as to be enabled to make a valuable contribution to a community? Can all that it seems on the surface of past history be transformed underneath so that the individual might learn and be allowed to live a life in the light of day rather than the darkness of night? And can a community of generous-hearted neighbours tolerate such a change?

There's a wisdom in reminding ourselves occasionally that, quite often, not all is what it first might seem.

God Bless

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