

‘Friend, go up higher!’

Never mind COVID, seating’s been a faith-issue for ever.

Jesus draws on chap 25 verse 6 from the Book of Proverbs,

set down seven centuries before,

going back to Solomon, a whole millennium before.

‘Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence

or stand in the place of the great;

for it is better to be told, “Come up here”,

than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.’

Despite Jesus it was clearly a problem for the Early Church

– I mean the First Century church, not us 8 o’clockers –

with the letter of James criticising churches who gave

the best seats to posh people but left the poor standing.

‘Pray remember the poor, the Church’s actual treasures,’

our St Laurence reminds those seated

by the churchwarden behind the back pillar.

Sitting with Jesus at the back,  
freed up from posturing or worming your way to the front,  
you notice things.

Like the man with the dropsy, cue youthful giggling,  
but actually oedema, legs or arms ballooning.

Taking the lowliest place frees you & JC to go for healing.

‘You’re not allowed to do that, it’s the Sabbath,’  
the posh people in the front rows wail.

‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,’  
Jesus responds, forging his own proverb.

It’s good to have a break, it’s good to catch your breath,  
it’s good to re-boot and re-charge,  
it’s good to be a Mary and not a Martha, busy, busy, busy.

But when keeping the Sabbath itself becomes an industry  
with all its manifold rules and instructions,  
it’s counter productive.

Rachel had some wonderful Jewish neighbours in Sheffield who spent a small fortune way-back buying a timing device to switch on their TV to watch the FA Cup inconveniently scheduled on the Sabbath day.

Thou shalt not switch on the telly on the Sabbath. Really?

In the original Greek it's not an ass who falls into the pit.

'If your **son** or cow fell into a pit on the Sabbath,

you'd pull him out,

so why can't I pull this son of God out of his misery?

Jesus declares, throwing out the rule book and going for it.

Sit humbly at the back, poised to be

an AngliCAN rather than an AngliCAN'T,

taking your cue from that great mother of the Church,

Barbara Woodhouse,

with the only command that really matters: 'Heal!'