Frown

**"Oh! don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt,
Sweet Alice, whose hair was so brown,
Who wept with delight when you gave her a smile,
And trembled with fear at your frown!"**
Thomas Dunn English, Ben Bolt (1885)

Having reflected a few days ago on the importance of a smile, I thought I'd focus on a frown today. To be honest, my wife accuses me of focussing on a frown too often. Frowning is something I'm good at. *I* say, I'm just concentrating. *She* says, I've got a frown on my face. But wherever it is, it gives off a dodgy signal – Tom isn't happy! To quote a friend, "I know some people who've got the kind of face that can turn water into vinegar." I would add – and maybe my wife would agree – that I know some people who frown so much they have a permanent black cloud over their head. *That's* the kind of signal a frown can give to others.

Robert Southey reports in his *Life of Nelson,* that Horatio, Lord Nelson, said at the battle of Copenhagen in 1801,

*I have only one eye – I have the right to be blind sometimes …
I really do not see the signal.*

We may hope people really don't see the signals we give off and stay blind, sometimes, to what we show to the world. But it doesn't work that way. As I explored yesterday, signals matter! We might say one thing, but if our body language – a frown included – gives a different message, no wonder the world gets confused.

Thomas Dunn English, the 19th century American physician, lawyer and writer, had it right when he gave advice to Ben Bolt about the signals he could give to his beloved Alice. If your smile, Mr Bolt, can make your lover weep with delight, then be aware that your frown can make her tremble with fear. Does my wife tremble with fear when I frown? I hope not! But maybe I should try harder to make her weep with my smile. After all, that would be a *much* better signal to give off, wouldn't it?

A prayer for today
*Your signals, Lord? The smile of welcome … the warmth of forgiveness …
My signals, Lord? Oh goodness! I'm going to have to work on that! Amen*