

12th May 2022

Timings

**“Observe due measure,
for right timing is in all things the most important factor.”**

Hesiod, *Works and Days* (c 700BC)

In my early ministry, I presented several programmes on TV. Some were “to camera”, following a script and being the sole participant. Others were “interview packages” with film-clips being slotted in as appropriate. But all of these were recorded, sometimes “as live”, with the expectation that the recording would run without a break, while others were edited afterwards. Only once did I front a “live” broadcast – and it was *very* different.

It was an Easter Sunday service. Everything had to be scripted, timed and rehearsed in advance. But whatever happened in the worship, we had to “come out” of the broadcast bang on time or else we would crash into next programme. Equally, it was a no-no to run short. All went according to plan, until we came to the prayer before the final hymn. Carefully scripted as it was, I was a few sentences into the prayer when the Floor Manager literally crawled up the pulpit steps (carefully keeping out of camera-shot), tugged at the hem of my cassock and whispered, “We’re short! We need another 90 seconds. Keep going till I tell you to stop.” All this was happening, of course, while I was still praying, and conscious that the cameras were focussed on me all the time. I *can* relate that I managed the extra minute-and-a-half *extempore* and came out of the prayer *to the second* as the Floor Manager counted me down. We finished on time! Afterwards, the Floor Manager announced, “You’re a star, minister! If you didn’t have a beard, I would kiss you.” I took that as a complement.

In that wonderful litany of the seasons of our lives from the book of Ecclesiastes, there’s a couplet which runs: “[There’s] a time to speak, and a time to be silent.” I hope we manage to keep an eye on our timings when we’re with one another. If it’s a time to speak, make sure your timings are right, so the right thing is said, in the right way, at the right time. And if it’s a time to be silent, use that time to listen well, to take on board what’s being said, before it’s your time to speak again. You shouldn’t need a TV Floor Manager offering to kiss you to know the truth of that!

A prayer for today

My time with you, Lord? No timings needed! Every moment is precious. Amen

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