



VIEW FROM THE CHALK FACE

Michaelmas 2020

Week 9 (w/c 16 November)

The word maelstrom sums up the current state of our world. The word originates from the north west coast of Norway and is a dangerous tidal current; today it is used to conjure images of turbulence and disorder. We are buffeted by swirling forces, often out of our control; our sense of familiarity and comfort taken away from us. Uncertainty, that insipid, silent foe, seeping, like treacle, into every pore. Our anchors, once thought immovable and solid, are challenged and threatened. We will all assign different context and nuance to those words and create their own personal meaning. As well as our homes, I hope that the school is a place of comfort, strength and refuge. Our green expanses give space to breathe and chapel is still a place for our minds to wonder and wander. Education works best when it cohabits, symbiotically, alongside family and there has never been a more important time where we need to work together and ensure that we are on the same course.

I wrote last time about Ruth Bader Ginsburg, that leviathan of American justice, and her importance in championing diversity in all its guises. The US election has captured our imagination and regardless of our own views on the rights and wrongs of the process or result, it has been irresistible global theatre. I fear there will be more scenes to play out in the coming months, and lessons we can take away around humility, decency and hubris.

This time of year is inextricably linked with remembrance. Although denied the chance to hold a service on Sunday 8th, each pupil has engaged in an act of remembrance through various chapel services and assemblies across the breadth of the school. In fact, the necessary manipulation to the regime has meant that more pupils than ever before have been involved. The idea of sacrifice has been used frequently in recent months, quite rightly, as we see our modern day heroes looking after those less fortunate; the medical staff doing those extra shifts; the carers being away from their families so they can support their patients. The sacrifice we often think of in November is of those who have lost their lives in conflict. As ever, we all have different views and experiences of such events. First World War poets advocated very different views of warfare:

Rupert Brooke: 'And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness, In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.'

Wilfred Owen: 'If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues'

Young men from this school, and from the local parishes, have, for generations, left these lanes, fields and homes, to go off to war. Young people who have sat where our children sit today; young people with the same hopes, dreams, worries and nerves that our children have now; sat on those chairs and those pews; sung those hymns, walked through those woods. There is a utopian, sepia focused view of chivalry, honour and patriotism. Fighting for the Constable version of England - the Haywain, the Corn field around the idyll of Dedham Vale. Conversely there is the harsh, physical reality of conflict. The First World War's version of the opening 20 minutes from 'Saving Private Ryan.' Brutal. Unforgiving. It



is our decision how we view such scenes and the resonance to today.

The three words that are conjured to me, when reflecting on all those who have fought for this country in times of war are: courage, sacrifice and integrity. Young people who were prepared to put their hands up and go to war – not that many of them wanted to, but they did so because they knew it was right. They knew that they had to play a part in defending the country; literally, as well as morally and politically. Standing up against tyranny and those who would oppress freedom and the human rights of all. It takes enormous courage to do that, as well as the potential sacrificing of their lives. Also, integrity to not shy away when a tough decision needs to be made and a difficult task achieved.

The Royal Norfolk Regiment raised 19 Battalions and was awarded 70 Battle Honours and 1 Victoria Cross, losing 6,000 men during the course of the First World War. That is some sacrifice. Those that went before us, their actions and deeds, their bravery and sacrifice, have allowed us to live as we do today. Allowed us to enjoy the freedoms that we take for granted. Without them, there would be no us. I hope that we are able to have a time to think what we can do to make the most of the opportunities that their deeds have allowed us. We honour them most by living as they would want us to live.

Best wishes,

Jon Perriss
Headmaster