

God, Life, and Everything
BALANCE

On Monday, I was visiting a friend who said their dog Hannah predicted the Super Bowl winner. They had asked her if the Broncos would win, and she sat quietly, unmoved. Then they asked her about the Seahawks, and she started excitedly barking. They had to watch to see if she was right, of course.

Good thing *I* didn't have to because I only watched for about five minutes, and then only to say I saw part of it. The Super Bowl, as you may guess, is nothing to me.

Not sure how many of us heretics *don't* join in the national holiday that is the Super Bowl, but the appeal of it has always eluded me. The game is often boring (well, *always* boring for me). The media hype over the commercials (seriously?) is weird. The half-time show is bland, and people only seem happy if there's a wardrobe malfunction (do shirtless Red Hot Chili Peppers count?). There is the Puppy Bowl, of course, and they're kind of cute.

Did I miss anything? Ah yes, the parties and the endless consumption.

In short, the Super Bowl is a celebration of excess.

And that makes me odd man out.

Excess is one of those things I don't get. I've tried it before, especially in my youth, but once tried, I rarely wanted to go back to it. Yes, in college, I tried going to bars for a bit and even getting drunk. But it had no appeal. I went to a couple of wild concerts, but I didn't get it - the music was too loud and the energy of the crowd too frenetic.

Even when I play hockey, I never understand the fights. Who really wants to lose control like that, and what exactly does it do?

This sense of excess translates to a lot of how we live our lives. We own far more clothing than we need or than our forebears once owned. We supersize our drinks because darn it, sixteen ounces just isn't enough when you can stuff 24 down your gullet.

I could go on, but you get the idea. Somehow, we have come to worship the idea that enough is not enough, that everything has to be outsized, outrageous, over the top.

There is another way. It's called balance.

Balance is when you have enough but not too much. It's when you're comfortable enough but not too comfortable, challenged enough but not overwhelmed, strong enough but not steroid-popping-body-builder strong. Balance is when you read but don't live with your head in a book, play but don't live to play, work but know when it's time to go home.

A balanced life knows how to be with and value others but also how to be alone without feeling lonely. A balanced life knows how to care for loved ones but also look beyond their immediate needs to the needs of others - near and far.

Balance is, in a way, not only woven into the fabric of my life but is part of my faith. When you think about it, Anglicans (Episcopalians are the US expression of Anglicanism) are all about balance. We have this tradition which we call the "three legged stool." The three legs are Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. As we are taught, when one of these legs is missing, the stool cannot stand.

Whether accurate or not, our received wisdom is that prior to the Reformation, the Church was primarily focussed on Tradition - the guidance and teaching of the Church. In other words, if Mother Church tells you $X+Y=Z$, then that is the way it is.

During the Reformation, Protestants lifted up Scripture as the sole guide necessary for discerning the will of God and forming doctrine. As a result, the old system of apostolic succession - bishops, priests and deacons was done away with.

In England, however, things played out differently. Catholics and Protestants were fighting for control, and the country was on the verge of civil war. One theologian, Richard Hooker, began writing a massive work called, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* which refuted both the catholic and protestant positions.

Although this is a gross oversimplification of the work, Hooker roughly said that Scripture is essential, but so is the Church, yet without Reason (by which he understood not only rational thought but also prayer) the other two collapse into chaos.

What Hooker advocated was, in a word, Balance.

I suspect living a life of balance is one of the most difficult things a human being can do. After all, in a world that demands the best, the most, the biggest, the loudest, the temptation is to either compete to be the superlative or to give up altogether. The life of balance lets go of superlatives but doesn't let go of life. It just discovers that superlatives aren't necessary.

It's like taking your spoon and getting it to balance on the edge of your cereal bowl. Letting it fall to one side or the other is so much easier, but when you get it just right, it is a beautiful thing.

I think I'll leave Hannah the dog to deal with the Super Bowl. For my part, I'll be balancing my spoon on the cereal bowl.