

'Intergenerational mobility': don't you just love social scientists? I hope you do. Rather like theologians- now there's a surprise- they'll never pass up the opportunity to use smart sounding jargon when plain words would do. Intergenerational mobility. Listen, my son, when you grow up I want you to be intergenerationally mobile. What it means, of course, is doing better than your parents.

So my father's father was a factory machinist: my father heading up the hill was a draughtsman and his firstborn a rocket-powered upwardly mobile accountant. Not just a room on the top but the whole house. So far a simple tale of dizzying ascent, but like the adverts for investments used to say, mobility can go down as well as up and so the intergenerational aspirant trajectory of my father's family took a definitive downward direction when his younger son entered the church. At least from now on the only way is up.

So there we are, neatly illustrated, intragenerational mobility at work. Almost always, when parents want their children to do better than them this means earning more money though I suppose it's conceivable that people like Rupert Murdoch or Priti Patel might want their children to do better than them by actually acquiring some human DNA. But usually, it's money. In which case, what a disappointment I am, though, truth be told, I suspect after I'd elected to take A level sociology my parents gave up hope for my future anyway. Failed in the monetary stakes, perhaps, there are, however two ways in which I can safely say 'Dad, I won.' And not because six foot of closely packed Yorkshire soil now lie between me and contradiction, but because sometimes the truth is just indisputable.

So, two ways I've improved on my immediate, progenitor.

First was my father's favourite party trick of constructing a song consisting entirely of a single swear word to the tune of Men of Harlech. If only Britain's Got Talent had been around then. An impressive talent, but, this I have bested: I can construct a song consisting entirely of swear words to *any* tune, not just a Welsh hymn. Eat my shorts. I can see you're impressed, but there's something even better, which is one upmanship is in matters of religion. For thirty odd years my father was miles ahead of the nearest competition in the family game known as 'More religious than thou'. As he was the only member of his nuclear brood to have been confirmed, he had a point.

It is often joked that for teenagers confirmation is a rite of passage, marking as it does the point when most of them decided to stop coming to church. Ever prudent,

I managed, as a teenager, to do that without bothering with the confirmation bit. Now, of course, I think I could win that competition; though if my father is now worshipping in heaven perhaps not. I can, still beat him at swearing. Give me a tune.

I digress. A repeated part of Mr Fenby senior's 'I've been confirmed' holiness was his claim to know the name of Lot's wife. Lot, Abraham's nephew. His spouse. Her name is not given in the Bible- and no it's not Mrs Lot or Saxa- but, apparently, this secret information my father would imply, was passed on through the bishop's hands to those superior enough to have undergone confirmation. He didn't know her name of course, but hey, I do. Not everything that can be known is in the Bible and everybody has a name and according to Jewish legend, the name of Lot's wife was Edith. Game, set and match.

Edith. Admittedly, Edith is not a hugely popular name right now but it has had some staying power, unlike her husband's. I mean, have you ever met anyone called Lot? Of course not, you'd have to be an especially malicious or perhaps unthinking parent to condemn your child to a lifetime of being introduced as

'that's your', 'fat of good', 'not a 'vacant' etc.

Here's a the *Reader's Digest* version of the tale in case this is all a lot of... stuff you've never heard before. It's in Genesis if you want to continue your studies over Sunday lunch.

God has decided to destroy a couple of cities and everybody in them because of their extreme wickedness. What they'd done isn't specified, probably something like deporting refugees to Rwanda. The only person unsullied by the depravity of Sodom & Gomorrah is Abraham's nephew, Lot, who is warned by an angel to get out before it gets too sulphurous, so Lot's lot pack up and leave. Just as they're on the slip road to the M25 Lot's wife looks back and is promptly turned into a pillar of salt.

Edith's is a super cameo rôle, a walk on don't walk off part. All she does is look back and becomes sodium chloride. Yet for all its narrative brevity it is a once seen never forgotten act.

Petrification is a commonplace in fairy tales and folk myths, from trolls in the sunlight to Medusa's gaze, but not in the Bible. I'm happy to be contradicted but after

exhaustive research- two minute Googling- discounting Jesus changing Simon's name to Peter (which means 'Rock') I'm pretty sure that in the scriptures only Lot's wife underwent the unpleasant process of salinisation. And why was she turned into rock salt? Did she curse God? Did she betray Israel to the armies of Babylon? Did she fashion an idol out of bronze and worship it?

None of the above. No. As Lot and his family were leaving the notoriously wicked fleshpots of Sodom prior to God's fire and brimstone destruction, Edith did the last thing she would ever do, she turned and looked back. And frozen in briny time, there she remained a monument to human folly and the Divine demand for complete dedication.

Genesis does not tell us why Edith looked back: presumably it was not to check on her children; what God would punish her for that. Through the ages the more prurient readers have read in Edith's behaviour a regretful longing for the debauchery of Sin City, but there was no previous sign of such a side to her character, and Old Testament writers never usually pass up the chance to label a woman 'loose'. We can never know, but perhaps as Edith upped and left her settled home, she looked back wistful for the familiar comforts, the stability, the routine she had just abandoned. Better the devil you know than the God who takes you away.

This seems to have been Jesus' understanding of Edith's thinking. 'Remember Lot's wife' he says in Luke's gospel 'Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it.'

We should easily understand Edith: nostalgia is, after all, the besetting British cultural disease: from Downton to Dad's Army, from red phone boxes to Call the midwife, from bonnet-busters to Brexit we love to look back, dewy eyed behind our rose-tinted spectacles, to a golden age that is any time except now. When the way forward is uncertain, the temptation to look back is almost irresistible. It may be some time before we look back on the past decade wistfully, but eventually we'll get there. Whether that's helpful or not in matters of culture or politics is hotly debated.

But when God calls it's really not going to help to drag your feet and cast regretful looks at what you must leave. The tall tale story of Edith turned into a pillar of salt is a rather crude way of pointing this out.

Wherever God calls you, there you must go; where he seeks to lead you, there you must follow. Like Edith, apart from an occasional run in with some rather pushy neighbours with dodgy tastes, we may be quite comfortable where we are right now, but right here, right now will not do. God calls us elsewhere. Heeding that call could well mean loss, it may mean going a long way outside of your comfort zone and then some; it will definitely mean major change. But whatever it looks like right here, right now, we can rest assured that God does not call his people to become less than they already are, he does not lead them to a worse destination than they set out from. And God *is* always pushing on, always calling his people onwards. The movement of salvation is always forward, his revelation progressive, his tradition that of change, wherever we are right now, we're not quite there yet.

The future God is leading us to is infinitely brighter, but we do have to be facing the right way to see it. And looking back is not looking in the right direction, looking back, you're never going to see it. God calls us to new life in Jesus, and unless we wish to end up inert, lifeless monuments to nostalgic pigheadedness, the only way we must go is forward.