

21st May 2020

Boats

**“Dance to your daddy, my little babby,
Dance to your daddy, my little lamb;
You shall have a fishy in a little dishy,
You shall have a fishy when the boat comes in.”**

Nursery Rhyme, Vocal Harmony 1806

Why do fishing boats have numbers and letters on the side? Every vessel used for fishing has to be registered with the Marine Coastguard Agency and have a licence from a Local Fisheries Office. A unique registration number is then displayed on the hull, with letters for the “home port”: GY=Grimsby; LT =Lowestoft; PZ=Penzance; and here, LH for Leith. It began in 1786 with the “Ship Registration Act”. Coastguards could track vessels, locate missing boats *and* keep an eye on smuggling! Nowadays it’s about safety, with regulations governing a boat’s construction, crew accommodation, maintenance of equipment, and the like.

You’ll have heard as often as I have during this crisis something like, “We’re all in the same boat.” I’m not so sure about that. A minister colleague put it differently – and, perhaps, more accurately – recently when he said, “We’re all in the same storm, but we’re in different boats.” We’re not all the same, and we’ll not ride out this storm in the same way.

So, we have to make sure our boat is safe, properly equipped, well-crewed and capable of facing the storm. There’s no registration agency to give us a number or a license for that. So *we* have to get it right, as best we can, to make sure our boat isn’t overwhelmed. But we also have to be aware of the other boats, the big ones and the little ones, the full-crewed and the single-handers. If we’re in the storm together, like the different fishing boats, in our harbour, we have to help one another.

We’ll all look for our own “fishy in a little dishy” when our boat comes in. So let’s make sure our boat is safe, *and* be aware that there are others trying to get safely home too through the same storm.

A prayer for today

Loving God, my boat is small, and the storm is fierce. Keep me safe; give me strength and purpose; help me to believe in my craft; and guide me safely home. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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