

5th September 2020

Tides

**“One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
But came the waves and washed it away:
Again I wrote it with a second hand,
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.
Vain man, said she, that dost in vain assay
A mortal thing so to immortalise.”**

Edmund Spenser, Amoretti (Sonnet, 1595)

A few weeks ago, I walked our dog down by the harbour when it wasn't much later than first light. Suddenly, a fishing boat appeared at the harbour mouth setting out to sea. For, even as dawn was breaking, the fishermen had to catch the tide for that day's fishing. The fishermen are governed by the tides. At low tide, the boats lean against the harbour walls, their keels settled in the sand. As the boats are lifted on the rising tide, the harbour echoes to the activity of the fishermen preparing to sail.

Robert Burns wrote in *Tam o' Shanter*,

Nae man can tether time or tide.

The tide will come and go, and we have no control over it whatsoever.

That image of the tide is used in our bereavement groups by Mike Wilson, a retired GP. Bereavement, he suggests, is like standing on a beach as the tide is going out. As you watch the waves, it goes so slowly. Sometimes, you think it's moved away, then it comes back again. Out and in, out and in, the waters lap the shore. And just when you thought it was OK, a bigger wave comes and wets your shoes. Bereavement is like that, Mike says. Grief comes in waves. Just when you thought you were fine, the tide comes back. And even when you felt you could predict its movement, a wave of grief comes out of nowhere and causes you distress.

You can't tether the tide. No one can. You can't stop grief affecting you. No one can. You can't predict the bigger wave. No one can. But you can know, as the fishermen do, that, over time, the tide will recede, and you *will* find rest by your harbour wall. And, when the tide comes in again, you can catch it on the rise and set sail once more.

A prayer for today

Lord, teach me patience in my sorrow. In its rising and falling, keep me safe. Amen.

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