

23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021

## Safety

**“Now, it is true that the nature of society is to create, among its citizens, an illusion of safety; but it is also absolutely true that the safety is always necessarily an illusion. Artists are here to disturb the peace.”**

*James Baldwin, An interview with James Baldwin, 1961*

As we were departing on a recent ferry trip from Oban to Mull, there was a “Bing Bong” on the PA followed by a safety announcement – muster stations, the emergency alarm, lifejackets and the like. I didn’t listen. I’d heard it before. I knew the ship. The sea was flat calm. I trusted the captain and the crew. Safety announcement? Not needed, thank you. It was the same the last time I flew somewhere. There was the usual “safety briefing” – exits, how to don a lifejacket, emergency oxygen masks, and all the while I was too busy with 3 Down in my crossword to listen.

It’s *not* a good way to react to such things, I know. Safety matters. Safety announcements aren’t just to make sure the ferry company or the airline are “covering their back”. They’re offered for *my* protection and for the welfare of all the travellers. Shouldn’t I take safety more seriously?

James Baldwin’s declaration that “safety is always necessarily an illusion” is a bold statement, as is his affirmation that it’s the role of the artist to “disturb the peace” of such illusionary safety. I get that. If safety is about complacency, selfishness, being content with what we have, while ignoring the needs of others and the bigger concerns that affect the whole of society, then of course it’s an illusion. Our lethargy, contentment, inactivity needs to be disrupted. We need to be made to think. But, nonetheless, isn’t safety still important? If safety is about security and peace of mind, then it matters a lot. Surely, that *isn’t* an illusion.

In Psalm 4:8, the Psalmist offers us this reassurance of faith:

*In peace I will lie down and sleep,  
for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

This safety is far from being an illusion. Maybe if a Psalmist had offered *that* kind of safety briefing on my ship or plane, I might have taken a bit more notice. Indeed, I think I’ll try to concentrate on *all* safety announcements from now on. After all, safety matters!

### A prayer for today

*If God’s safety is promised to me, shouldn’t I offer my trust in return?*