

11th January 2022

Thither

"Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

William Wordsworth, Intimations of Immortality

This is my first "Thought for the Day" from the place where I'll be based for the next three months. Yesterday, I travelled from home to the island of Islay, off the west coast of Scotland, where I'll be locum minister from now through to the end of March, working with the churches on Islay and its near neighbour, Jura. It's been a while in the planning, and the logistics have been complicated. But I'm here safely and ready to begin my work.

There was packing and organising to see to, of course, followed by a four-hour drive across Scotland and round the sea lochs to the ferry terminal. Weather issues and staff shortages because of Covid meant unpredictability of ferry times. But, once I was on board, it was a two-hour journey to Islay, and a short drive to my accommodation in Bowmore.

"A season of calm weather"? For January in a Scottish winter, I was blessed with that. "Sight of the immortal sea"? If by immortal Wordsworth meant "eternal", ever-lasting, consistently beautiful, that's what's right in front of my accommodation. Seeing "children sport upon the shore"? Not yet! And "mighty waters rolling" could be brought on by the next storm. But for me, travelling "thither" has been worth it.

What will this "thither" contain for me? I have no idea! I have thoughts, of course, some plans and a few expectations that have been communicated to me. But everything? No! Travelling "thither" has been enough so far. What happens "hither" will take its own shape.

Robert Louis Stevenson said in *El Dorado*, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive ..." I've been hopeful as I've travelled. From "thither" I am now "hither"! And hopefulness will still carry me forward.

A prayer for today

Hither and thither, I go. Thither and hither, you are there before me. Amen