

11th March 2022

Sailing

“Fortune brings in some boats that are not steer’d.”

William Shakespeare, Cymbeline

I was never a great sailor. My first trip at sea was on a school jaunt to France, on the short crossing from Dover to Calais. Just after we’d left the harbour, I was as sick as a dog! The gentle swell seemed to have affected lots of other passengers too. The public toilets were busy on that ferry.

So, I was never a great sailor. But over the years, I’ve learned to trust those who are. I remember Donald, the skipper of a little open boat called *Applecross*, which, before the days of a CalMac car-ferry, took passengers on the short journey from Mull to Iona. He wasn’t the cheeriest of men, and his people-skills might have left a little to be desired. But he was a remarkable sailor. I was on the Sound of Iona once with a boat-full of Iona visitors and their luggage, when a sudden squall blew up half-way across. I swear the waves were so big that the little boat was up on its end. We were soaked – and I was scared! But Donald was a good sailor, and, wet but relieved, we landed safely on the Iona jetty. I was never a good sailor, but, over the years, I’ve learned to trust those who are.

But what do we do with Shakespeare’s take in *Cymbeline* on sailing, where he has Pisanio say:

*All other doubts, by time let them be clear’d:
Fortune brings in some boats that are not steer’d.*

Despite there being good sailors around, the varied fortunes of life will bring in some boats over which the best of sailors have no control, boats “that are not steer’d”. We set a course, we trust skilled and experienced sailors, but we often have no control over the journey or destination.

I hope you can cope with that. How? You’ll know best. For me, I am reassured by the words of the Psalmist, who not only believed in God’s purposes the way I believed in Donald’s skill with *Applecross*, but was also convinced that, no matter what fortune threw at him, he would find a way through. That’s why in Psalm 139 he gives us ...

A prayer for today

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.