

16<sup>th</sup> March 2022

## Distance

**“Frozen by distance.”**

*William Wordsworth, Address to Kilchurn Castle*

The distance between Bowmore and Port Ellen on Islay is 11 miles. On “the low road” past the airport, 7 miles of that is dead straight. Half-way along the straight section, there’s a “mile marker”, one of the white-painted, granite blocks which were once common on country roads in Scotland. I expected to see the distance to Port Ellen on one side and to Bowmore on the other. But while the stone’s white paint is bright and pristine, there are no miles displayed on either side. A mile-marker with no miles on it.

With Sat Navs and Google Maps, maybe we don’t need mile-markers anymore, especially on a short and easy journey. But a mile-marker which fails to display the miles left to travel, got me thinking.

Today, nearly three weeks into the war in Ukraine, we’re on a journey, but the mile-markers have no miles on them. We’re on a journey, and we have no idea how far we’ve still to travel, or even what our destination might be. We may not be “frozen by distance”, but we are certainly *fearful* by distance. We’ve no Sat Nav to show us directions, no Google Maps to give us an overview. We pass a mile-marker that has no miles displayed on it, and we are dismayed, and we are afraid.

The American singer-songwriter, Tom Paxton, in his song, *Outward Bound*, offers us these lines:

*Outward bound, on a journey without ending;  
Outward bound, uncharted waters beneath our bows.  
Far behind, the green familiar shores are fading into time,  
And time has left us now.*

That’s how I feel today. I cried in church last Sunday morning, sharing prayers for Ukraine written by the Iona Community’s *Wild Goose Resource Group*. My distress was because I felt I was on a journey without ending. I pray that the mile-markers on this awful journey might have the miles written on them soon, or that my Sat Nav might say, “You have reached your destination” – where we find the peace and reconciliation we crave.

### A prayer for today

*Travel with me, Lord, in my fearfulness.  
Understand my prayers when I ask, “Are we there yet?” Amen*