

31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

## Watchfulness

**“I hope I am over wary; but if I am not, there is, even now,  
something of ill-omen, amongst us.”**

*Abraham Lincoln, The Lyceum Address (1839)*

According to the Isle of Jura website (<https://isleofjura.scot>), the people on Jura are outnumbered 30 to 1 by red deer. The island is currently home to nearly 7000 red deer, and deer numbers have been controlled for over 1000 years! Seven estates are now responsible for their management.

I've written in the past about the perils of deer on country roads, especially at night. But I've now recognised another side of these creatures. Deer, both stags and hinds, are wary and watchful.

On a walk recently on Jura, coming down from Loch Tarbert to the beauty of Tarbert Bay, I explored an ancient cemetery, reputed to be the resting place of some of St Columba's monks. As I approached the graveyard, I saw three stags and a group of hinds behind the cemetery, on a bank of grass and bracken above the beach. I'd obviously been noticed, for the stags were staring right at me and standing stock-still. As I moved across their line of vision to take some photographs, they watched, and watched, and watched, never moving from their position; always wary and alert; ever vigilant. Was I a threat, a predator, a danger? Did the hinds need protection? Was it time to get away from trouble? Watching ... Ready for the unexpected ... Always wary ... Constantly on guard ...

It is, of course, a characteristic of all the animal world. If you're likely to be under threat, you're constantly on guard. You have to stay watchful!

In Peter's first letter (1 Peter 5:8), he gives guidance to the elders of the Church as to how they should be "shepherds of God's flock". He says: "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." And in Colossians 4:2 we find Paul encouraging us all to "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." Be alert! Be watchful! Be vigilant! Good advice, indeed.

Like Abraham Lincoln "I hope I am over wary" when I need to be, if wariness and watchfulness, as Peter and Paul suggest, serve to equip me better in my faith, in case "something of ill-omen" might come my way.

### **A prayer for today**

*Keep me alert for your purposes, Lord. Keep me watchful for opportunities to serve. Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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