

30th May 2022

Delayed

“With sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.”

Homer, The Odyssey, Book 1

Due to adverse weather conditions, the 15.30 ferry from Kennacraig is delayed. It will now depart for Port Askaig at 17.00. So ran a “text alert” from the CalMac ferry company back in March as I waited for my boat back to Islay after a spell on the mainland. I wasn’t best pleased!

“Delayed”. It’s a regular occurrence on Islay and all the Scottish Islands that are served by ferries, because, of course, the running of the ships is dependent on weather conditions – and that’s *before* travellers have to cope with mechanical breakdowns, a crew affected by Covid, ships being transferred to other routes, or “annual refit” issues. No one likes delays, but, like all islanders, we have to cope with them as best we can.

But I’ve another delay on my mind today. Not a ferry’s delay, nor Homer’s “amorous delay”, but a theological delay which has puzzled me for many years. The Church has a “Christian Year”, following significant events in the life of Jesus. There’s Advent starting at the beginning of December, then the twelve-days of Christmas through to Epiphany on 6th January. There’s Lent, Holy Week and Easter, from Ash Wednesday through Christ’s Passion to the glory of the Resurrection. Forty days thereafter there’s the Ascension, then the coming of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, the birth of the Church. And this is where the delay puzzles me.

If, as the Gospels tell us, Jesus “ascended to the right hand of God”, commissioning his followers to “go into all world” with the Gospel and promising the Holy Spirit would come, why the delay? If Jesus had returned to glory, why was the Holy Spirit not called upon right there and then? But I’m beginning to figure it out. It has to be about waiting expectantly, getting ready, having a heightened awareness, so that, when the Spirit comes, the disciples are prepared for the challenge. The Holy Spirit delayed? Maybe. But this was the gift of time, not to rush things, but to be properly ready for the Great Commission.

So, delays *can* be useful, it seems. Now, how did I fill my time with some purpose before my delayed ferry was due?

A prayer for today

Living God, as I try respond to your Spirit, help me make good use of any delay. Amen