

19th January 2025

Mariners

**"I fear thee, ancye[n]t Marinere!
I fear thy skinny hand;
And thou art long and lank and brown
As is the ribb'd Sea-sand."**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*

I don't know why a "lank and brown" and somewhat skinny mariner should cause fear for anyone. But I once knew a ferryman who struck the fear of God into me. It would be quite wrong for me to name him here. But suffice to say, that he was one of the most fearsome men I've ever met. And yet he was a mariner to whom I would have trusted my life.

To be honest, I have far more problems with those who *organise* ferry services than with those who actually make them happen. The recent debacle with the provision of new ferries for some of Scotland's vital sea-links, beggars belief. We've had new ferry recently delivered after years of delay and massively over budget, with a ferry terminal that's too small and needs to be reconstructed to accommodate it. I ask you! But, despite that, let's still remember to thank God for all the "marineres", be they ancient or not, fearsome or otherwise, and ask the "powers that be" to take lessons from the diligence and abilities of those remarkable men and women.

Having spent three months working on the island of Islay a few years ago, I know the importance of ferries for the health and well-being, social life and economy of the islanders. Problems with ferry provision, *and* the vagaries of Scotland's weather, notwithstanding, the staff on our ferries, sailors and others, are vital for us all. So let's moan about politicians and decision-makers when we need to. But let's never take for granted those who take us from here to there, to make the rest of our journey possible.

And learning from my "Thought for the Day" yesterday, let's pause and be grateful for those who provide ferries for us in other ways too: morally; educationally; spiritually; politically; in relationships; through depression; in bereavement. These are *our* skilled and experienced mariners. Without them, we might have been stuck where we didn't want to be. But, having got us across, they've given us the opportunity to continue our journey on, to where we need to get to next.

A prayer for today

For all those whose skill and experience takes me forward, I thank God today. Amen