

25th June 2023

Ferries

**“A chieftain to the Highlands bound
Cries, ‘Boatman, do not tarry!
And I’ll give thee a silver pound
To row us o’er the ferry!”**

Thomas Campbell, *Lord Ullin’s Daughter*

I’m on Iona for two weeks, and to get here, I’ve had to reacquaint myself with the importance of ferries. Many travellers in Scotland are familiar with ferries: large ferries to transport buses, trucks, caravans and cars between the mainland and our islands; smaller ferries that shuttle across small stretches of water to avoid a long detour round the head of a loch; “foot-ferries”, small boats taking passengers to an island where there are no cars; ferries called by a bell rung on one side of a stretch of water to summon the ferry when it’s needed – whether it costs “a silver pound” or not. And, joy of joys, the ferry that carried me to Iona yesterday.

In recent times, *CalMac*, the main provider of ferries in Scotland, has been accused of under-performing: breakdowns; delays; sudden alterations in schedules. Ferries matter, don’t they? And as I watched the Mull-Iona ferry come and go across the Sound of Iona yesterday, I reflected on how reliable ferries need to be, and how their importance should never be taken for granted. Ferries *really* matter, don’t they?

We run ferries for people all the time. I don’t just mean “ferrying” kids to football training or Brownies, transporting elderly people to church and back, or traveling with a friend to a weekly choir rehearsal. I’m thinking of the ferrying we do metaphorically, carrying, holding, facilitating, supporting one another: when we’re listening to someone in anguish, as they travel with their thoughts; while we spend time with folk who are ill, as they wonder where life will take them; as we wait with a dying person, praying that they will journey to the end of life safely and at peace; when we work with bereaved people, navigating the stormy waters of grief.

So, people need us to be reliable ferries, in order that they can be helped to be carried safely. And taken for granted? I hope not, for, large or small, when people need help on their journey of life, ferries matter. You *know* that, when, like me, you are carried to where you need to be.

A prayer for today

Lord, you’ve carried me safely here. So, when I have carrying to do, help me do it well. Amen

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