

12th January 2022

Settled

“The settled will of the Scottish people.”

John Smith,

Speech to the Scottish Labour Conference, March 1994

The late John Smith’s affirmation above was, of course, confirmed by history. For in 1997 the Scottish people voted for the establishment of their own national parliament. “The settled will of the Scottish people” it was indeed, and John Smith had anticipated that. The “settled will” of any group of people in any enterprise is a very precious thing.

But “settled” forever? Can we *ever* say we are “settled”? Democracy means that governments can change, with new policies enacted and different “norms” established. There are some who will say, “Too much change”, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”, “Let’s hold on to what we know”. Others bemoan changes in attitudes, the loss of trust in familiar institutions, alterations in culture and behaviour. In our churches, in a time of disturbance in our structures and ways of working, the cry is often “Just let us be”. And, in our faith, are we not sometimes restless and consumed by uncertainties? In so many ways, we yearn to be settled – and for always.

I shared with you yesterday travelling “thither” to the island of Islay, where I’ll be for three months. Today, I’m in a new home, but I’m not yet settled. My surroundings are unfamiliar. My routines aren’t established. Familiarity of shopping, distances, where to find things, how the central heating works, hasn’t happened yet. It may not for some time. And the views are different, as are the accents, the attitudes, and even the smells of the land and the sea. I am *far* from being settled. I’m not *un*-settled, in the sense of being unsure and doubting my decision to come here. But I am not yet settled. That will take a while.

In that sense, not being settled is a good thing. It’s about discerning, being challenged, having to be on my mettle, growing into new ways, coping with changes, appreciating the unfamiliar. Will there ever be “the settled will” of Tom Gordon? I genuinely hope not. For, if I ever become completely settled, will I not stop growing, and learning, and being amazed at the wonder and variety of life?

A prayer for today

You’re still with me in my times of change, right? OK, then. That’s that settled. Amen