

New post on The Friday Fix



Dignity – Karine Polwart

by [inertus](#)

Diana writes:

There's a man I meet,

walks up our street.

He's a worker for the Council,

has been 20 years.

And he takes no lip of nobody

and litter off the gutter.

Puts it in a bag,

and never thinks to mutter.

And he packs his lunch in a Sunblest bag

the children call him Bogie.

He never lets on, but I know

coz he once told me.

He let me know a secret

about the money in his kitty.

He's gonna buy a dinghy

and call her Dignity.

I'll sail her up the west coast,

through villages and towns.

I'll be on my holidays

and they'll be doing their rounds.

*They'll ask me how I got her
and I'll say "I saved my money".
They'll say "isn't she pretty,
that ship called Dignity".
I'm telling this story
in a faraway sea
sipping down raki
and reading Maynard Keynes.
And I'm thinking about home
and all that it means
and a place in winter for Dignity.
Stand it up, stand it up...
And I'm thinking about home
I'm thinking about faith
I'm thinking about work
And I'm thinking how good it would be
to be here some day
on a ship called Dignity.*

Karine Polwart's cover of Deacon Blue's Dignity has kept me company throughout the pandemic. I love the stripped-back simplicity and the clarity of the vocals.

For a while in lockdown the song was a source of hope – an old friend reminding me to trust there would be a day when travel and freedom would be possible again. In the meantime, it helped me take comfort in the familiarity of the small coastal town where I live. ***"There's a man I meet, walks up our street, he's a worker for the Council, has been 20 years"*** ...Yes. Yes there is. Even at the height of lockdown, I would pass council workers day-by-day on the High Street and we'd smile and say hello as we went about our business. I have been here 4 years, but some of them have been here all their lives, quietly keeping things running, and being paid a pittance for the privilege.

And now, in the last few weeks, as furlough support and now the uplift in Universal Credit have been scrapped, this song has been reframed for me into something else: a ballad of lament and a reflection on injustice that ignites a flame of anger in me.

I heard on the news today that the reduction in Universal Credit is the biggest effective cut ever imposed, reducing some people's income by 10% in the midst of massive rises in fuel costs, and at the onset of winter. I know people, and I bet you do too, whose already tight budgets will be forced into the red by this change. It will rob people of dignity.

My Christian faith teaches me to pursue a society where God-given dignity is nurtured in all people. It's not complicated, really. We're all Jock Tamson's bairns, created in the Divine Image. In ancient times, the scriptures taught that the widow, the orphan and the stranger were to be accorded special care because of their vulnerability. We are charged with the imperative to look after for those who are most in need. When we fail, this the prophets call us repentance on pain of disaster. Justice, we are told, will roll like a river and righteousness like a mighty stream (Amos 5:4).

In my mind's eye, Bogie wraps his sandwiches, in that same old bread-bag day by day, and walks up the street to begin his work. It's cold and wet, but he trusts that with perseverance and saving he can put a little money by each week. It may be hard graft, but slowly he can build towards a dream for the future.

Hope and dignity go hand in hand, and this week the ship called Dignity sailed further away from reach for many people.

As I listen to this song again today, I think about home. I think about faith. I think about work. I think how good it would be, to be here some day with everyone on a ship called Dignity.

Hope must not be allowed to die. I hear a prophetic voice cry "injustice" and I resolve to stand against it.

Find out more about Karine Polwart at <https://www.karinepolwart.com/>

Deacon Blue are just about to tour the UK - find out more at <https://deaconblue.com/>