St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church

St. Aidan’s Day

A Holy Place

Lindisfarne is a holy place. And it was made holy long ago, in a large part, by the intention, dedication and faith of a humble man who was courageous, kind, compassionate and brave. St. Aidan. Lindisfarne is known as Holy Island, a cradle of early Christianity in England. The monastery of Lindisfarne was founded by Irish monks, led by St. Aidan in the mid seventh century. In obedience to King Oswald, Aidan had come from Iona, of the west coast of Scotland to this equally remote and beautiful place off the northeastern English coast. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Remote and beautiful. A place which you can approach by foot as have pilgrims for centuries, led by St. Aidan’s ancient route across the causeway between land and the island. A person has about seven hours at his disposal to walk the three-mile trek and part of our pilgrimage is to recall that we, too, can walk in the footsteps of Aidan as he walked with the receding tide, his eyes on the island before him, perhaps contemplating his plans for expanding the Christian faith to the Anglo-Saxon natives in the countryside down the coast all the way to London.

St. Aidan didn’t think small. His compassion did not mean he was complacent. His passion was not personal. He wanted to spread the Gospel and it helped Aidan to find strength for this work in the beauty of his surround. It helped renew his soul to consider God’s guiding presence directing his life. His preference for the simplicity of life did not mean he wasn’t ambitious and would simply rest on Lindisfarne without venturing further and further afield to connect with others and to create networks of trust.

A man of peace, St. Aidan was slow to anger, especially when he was speaking to hostile tribal Saxon leadership who were suspicious of his Christian theology and teaching. He was brave while peaceful, in that he was unafraid to enter into these connections and very often befriended those who would usually be too hostile to approach. It was that fearless, humble peacefilled faith that enabled Aidan to accomplish his goal of converting the pagan English to Christianity, thereby expanding his own gift of the holy to others beyond himself.

What a legacy. And what a beautiful agenda to live up to and so we pray to St. Aidan to pray for us as we move forward in living fifteen centuries later. What will our legacy be and how will we go about creating it for the centuries ahead? How do we find similarities between the life of St. Aidan in the year 635 and the life of St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church in the year 2021?

Just like Lindisfarne, we are considered by many to be remote. When someone asks me where St. Aidan’s is, I state with enthusiasm, “We’re just up Glisan about 10 or 15 minutes from town.”

“In Portland?” they ask.

“Oh yes,” I respond. “We are St. Aidan’s Portland.”

There was a time when we told people we were St. Aidan’s, Gresham, and people immediately thought of us as being located at the foot of Mount Hood.

So people think of us, whether in Gresham or in Portland, as being somewhat remote. But we’re not as remote as Lindisfarne itself, and people don’t need to walk across a three-mile causeway at low tide in order to reach us, but people still think of us as too far to drive unless they live nearby.

If St. Aidan were here, I think he would work to change all that. I think he would be setting off to talk to anyone he could about what is happening at 174th and Glisan, and that it is more than just a building which houses a congregation, just as Lindisfarne was more than a monastery which housed a bunch of monks. It is a holy place worthy of pilgrimage because it is compassionate, kind, generous and because it is faithful and because it is approachable.

Faith and faithful practice are what make a place holy. Care and stewardship of the land which holds it are what make a place holy. Love of God and all God’s creatures, all God’s people and all God’s creation, emanating from those who use the space, make a place holy.

If St. Aidan were here, I think he would look at the land around us, and call upon us all to contribute to keeping it beautiful, the buildings and the grounds, not just for ourselves, but for our community and for all who behold it. Lindisfarne was a community in itself, a place for the faithful to worship, but it was also a planning place for the betterment of the community in which it found itself, and it remains so even today.

Following in the footsteps of St. Aidan, we are each called, and called in unity, to reach out into the community in which we find ourselves. Some of it may be skeptical, some of it may be too busy, some of it may think we are out of step. It is no different than when Aidan walked the east coast of England, spreading the Good News of Christ in his own day, not only by preaching it, but by practicing it and by his followers practicing it. The people of the time, beset by tribal wars, territorialism, paganism and wild ideas and imaginations, don’t seem to be better off than we, when we consider the state of our own world today and compare it to theirs. Perhaps we can eliminate climate change, but a good thunderstorm in that day would have more than one attributing the noise of the storm to angry gods!

We are called to be kind and compassionate, not only to strangers but to each other and, in the name of Cuthbert, our Benedictine study group learns each week what it means to live in concert with others in a close-knit community.

We are called to be brave and bold, and by being so, we become visible. And, as we become more visible, we must continue to examine ourselves to ensure we are carrying forward Aidan’s of faithful compassion and kindness. Isn’t this how we want to be known? As kindly welcoming and as lovers and stewards of all God’s beautiful creation; as interested, kindly guides to all who wish to explore walking in the Way of Christ.

To think and to pray and to walk in the way of Christ must have been easy for Aidan as he contemplated Lindisfarne. And now, we too, will be able to think, pray and walk in the way of Christ, as we walk along the continuous and circuitous path of the labyrinth here at St. Aidan’s and it seems fitting to let you know in this very moment, that we have received an additional very generous donation toward the building of a new labyrinth at St. Aidan’s, and your vestry has voted to put forth its own support of the project. This means that we may well be able to break ground this fall to begin building what we will call the Lindisfarne Labyrinth, named after the monastic walkway of our patronal saint, St. Aidan.

We will still be hoping for more financial support along the way and ask that you consider making the Lindisfarne Labyrinth project one choice for support in the months to come. We hope to have a hard-scape two color textured concrete pattern which will be easily accessible to all, as well as accessible pathways and seating areas.

The labyrinth will be another way for St. Aidan’s to connect with its surrounding community and partners, whether they be fellow Christians from Kingdom Harvest or friends from other churches near us, or those who share our values for preservation of the land, such as the Sandy River Watershed Council or our new partner who takes care of Russian elderly and infirm, the East Portland Adult Daycare Service.

Above all, the Lindisfarne labyrinth will be a place for us, made possible by us and by friends of St. Aidan’s and by a legacy of contemplation, prayer and holy practice bequeathed to us through the centuries by St. Aidan, St. Cuthbert and others who made their own pilgrimage in their own time. And, it is our intent to invite the tribes of indigenous people who lived on this land before we came to be on it, to join us in this effort as a means of recognition of land ownership and reconciliation between St. Aidan’s and those who held the land before. St. Aidan would have done nothing less.

In this time of tumult and confusion, a time of disaster and war, division and offense, let us turn our attention to offering what the world needs in great abundance, and let us take from the lessons handed down to us from our own Aidan and Cuthbert, to be patient, kind, compassionate, brave, enthusiastic, inclusive and welcoming. And let us give thanks for this legacy that will allow us to move forward with hope for ourselves and for what we can contribute to the community that needs so much of it all.

St. Augustine, whom we remembered yesterday, said in his famous quote, “For it is one thing to see the Land of Peace from a wooded ridge, and yet another to walk the road that leads to it.”

Let us join together in peace toward each other, toward our community and make this piece of land given to our care by God and those gone before, A Holy Place, in the name Jesus Christ and his faithful servant, St. Aidan, Bishop of Lindisfarne

Amen.

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R. Culver+

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