

Aidan's Way Day 13

Celtic Justice and Hospitality

Thank you for joining me in prayer on this the thirteenth day of my three-week pilgrimage from Iona to Lindisfarne in the footsteps of Saint Aidan, praying the Bible together each day in our usual way. Today I'm excited to be joining the fourth of the five trails which link up to form Aidan's Way. So far I've traversed St Conan's Way from Iona to the Bridge of Orchy, the West Highland Way to Strathblane, and the John Muir Way to Linlithgow. But now it's time to join the old Cross Borders Drove Road, carved into the Pentland and Southern Upland hills by hardy highlanders over several centuries herding their cattle towards the markets of northern England.¹

(Want to know more about this unique series on pilgrimage? Check out the special introductory day, "An Introduction to Pilgrimage").

Pause

*As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly,
to re-centre my scattered senses upon the presence of God.*

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

High King of Heaven, would You walk with me and talk with me as I seek to follow in the footsteps of Your servant Aidan today? I have set my heart on pilgrimage, so challenge me and change me, cleanse and rearrange me, until the fire that burned in Aidan's heart, burns brightly in mine.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's abundant mercy today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 35:

I will rejoice in the LORD.

I will be glad because he rescues me.

With every bone in my body I will praise him:

"LORD, who can compare with you?

Who else rescues the helpless from the strong?

Who else protects the helpless and poor from those who rob them?"

Psalm 35:9-10 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Yesterday I explored Celtic insights into the first two of the six practices at the heart of Lectio365: creativity and prayer. Today I'm moving on to focus on the next two: justice and hospitality, drawing inspiration from Aidan's life, alongside the challenging teaching of Jesus...

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory... he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats... Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me... Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you...? And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

Matthew 25: 31-32, 34-35, 37-38, 40 (ESVUK)

Aidan and his fellow monks took these verses seriously: feeding the hungry, caring for the poor, and welcoming strangers within their monasteries and out on the road. It is said of Aidan that "he never sought or cared for any worldly possessions, and loved to give away to the poor who chanced to meet him whatever he received from kings or wealthy folk."² The Rule of Saint Columba required a simple lifestyle: "Whatever little or much you possess of anything; whether clothing, or food, or drink... it is not fitting... to have any distinction of property with [your] own free brother."³ On one occasion, when the King gave Aidan a very fine horse, he received it gratefully, rode it out triumphantly, and presented it promptly to the very first beggar he met. The King was furious, but Aidan stood his ground: "Is the son of a mare more dear to you than that son of God?"

Ask

I ask the Lord now for a practical opportunity to worship Him this week by personally showing love to someone who seems vulnerable, lonely, hurting, or on the edge.

Pause and pray

Thinking now of someone whose vocation involves serving those whose lives and bodies are broken, I pray that they will be renewed in strength and hope, sensing the gratitude of God Himself – the smile of Jesus – expressed in today's verses.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I notice its emphasis on hospitality as well as justice...

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Matthew 25: 31-32, 34-35, 37-38, 40 (ESVUK)

Jesus couldn't be clearer: the offering of food, drink, and a warm welcome to strangers is nothing less than an act of worship worthy of an eternal reward. Inspired by these words, the Rule of Saint Benedict, written some seventy years before Aidan, instructed monastic communities: "All who arrive as guests are to be welcomed like Christ, for He is going to say, 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'" (*Rule*, LIII)⁴ Christian hospitality is not just an optional extra for people with nice homes. It is such a fundamental expression of salvation that here Jesus even makes it a signpost towards eternal destiny. Radical hospitality begins in my heart, not my home, with an attitude of availability towards anyone in need. And so I ask myself what it might mean today, to engage with the strangers I meet as nothing less – no one less – than Jesus Christ Himself?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Eternal God, You are welcome to disrupt my schedule today,
Give me grace to embrace Your presence.
Loving Lord Jesus, give me eyes to see You in those I meet today,
Give me grace to embrace Your presence.
Gentle Spirit, make my heart and my home Your own today,
Give me grace to embrace Your presence.*

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me promises that:

*'If you spend yourself on behalf of the hungry...
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.
I will guide you always; and satisfy your needs.'*
Personalised from Isaiah 58:10–11a (NIVUK)

Closing Prayer

***Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.
Amen.***

¹You can follow Pete's pilgrimage and hear the occasional song inspired by the journey on 'The Pilgrim Podcast' available at www.PeteGreig.info.

²Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, (London: Penguin Books, 1955; Revised ed. 1990), p150.

³You can read the 28 instructions of The Rule of Saint Columba at <https://st-columba.com/the-rule-of-st-columba/>

⁴Rule of Saint Benedict, Chapter LIII.