

Aidan's Way Day 19

The Lindisfarne Gospels

Thank you for joining me in prayer in the closing stretch, on this the penultimate day of my 300-mile pilgrimage from Iona to Lindisfarne in the footsteps of Saint Aidan, praying the Bible together each day in our usual way. Today I am walking past Cuthbert's cave, seeing the ocean for the first time since leaving Mull almost three weeks ago, and – most excitingly of all – getting my first distant glimpse of the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. It's hard to describe the sense of anticipation and joy I'm feeling.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

As I prepare to arrive on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne tomorrow, I look back with great gratitude on the wonderful ways God has led me on this journey, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 32:

You are my hiding place;
you protect me from trouble.
You surround me with songs of victory.
The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life.
I will advise you and watch over you."

Psalm 32:7-8 (NLT)

Pause and pray

I am particularly looking forward to seeing the Lindisfarne Gospels tomorrow,² one of the world's greatest literary treasures, laboriously and lovingly created there on Holy Island as a celebration of the ultimate value placed on God's word by Aidan and his successors...

How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.
Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to keep your righteous rules.

Psalm 119:103-106 (ESVUK)

It's not just the monks of Lindisfarne who cherished the Scriptures, but the Psalmist himself for whom it was 'sweeter than honey'. This is significant imagery. God's word is something to be tasted, savoured, experienced, and ingested, not just studied, analysed, and obeyed. The Lindisfarne Gospels took ten long years to carefully transcribe and prayerfully illuminate in the earliest years of the eighth century. They are fabulously illustrated with angels and dragons, ornate patterns, and even household pets playing around the words of the gospel themselves. Spread over 516 pages, it is estimated that it took 150 calf skins, and 90 different colours made from just six minerals and vegetable extracts, all bound with egg white and fish glue. Clearly these monks valued the Scriptures more highly than anything else in the world, and they had no hesitation in using their imaginations to explore, celebrate, and bring God's word to life.

Ask

At a time when multiple versions of the Bible are instantly available on my phone, it is good to be reminded of its value to former generations. I ask the Lord to deepen my desire and my delight in His word.

Pause and pray

Wycliffe Bible translators estimate that 1 billion people are still without the Scriptures in their own native language.³ I pray now for those spending their lives faithfully working on the vital task of Bible translation, that they may be inspired and fall in love with God's word again and again as they work.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I listen for a particular word or phrase that the Holy Spirit is highlighting to me today...

How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.
Your word is a lamp to my feet
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Psalm 119: 103-106 (ESVUK)

What word or phrase jumped out at me from these verses?

Love for the Scriptures has been the universal mark of men and women of God down the ages, from King David, to Aidan, to Bernard of Clairvaux, the thirteenth century leader of the Cistercian Order who rebuilt Melrose Abbey as its first monastery in Scotland, and a few years earlier built Waverley Abbey, where I am often based, as its first monastery in England. Bernard's love of the Scriptures is contagious. He writes: 'When with eager minds we examine his rulings, the decrees from his own mouth; when we meditate on his law day and night, let us be assured that the Bridegroom is present, and that he speaks his message of happiness to us lest our trials should prove more than we can bear.'⁴

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I yield to God's beauty today with an 800-year-old prayer from the French Cistercian monk, Isaac of Stella:

*He himself is my contemplation.
He is my delight. Him for His own sake I seek above me.
From Him Himself I feed within me.
He is the field in which I labour.
He is my cause. He is my effect. He is my beginning. He is my end.
He is for me eternity.⁵*

Yielding Promise

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

*My word that proceeds from My mouth will not return to Me empty,
but it will accomplish what I please, and it will prosper where I send it.
You will indeed go out with joy...
Isaiah 55:11-12a (NLT)*

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.

²The original Lindisfarne Gospels are kept in the British Museum in London in a glass cabinet but there is a beautiful replica in St Mary's Church on the island.

³<https://illuminations.bible/>

⁴Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Jazzybee Verlag: Kindle Edition, 2012), p182.

⁵Isaac of Stella, quoted in *The Lord of the Journey: A Reader in Christian Spirituality*, ed. Roger Pooley and Phillip Seddon (London: Collins Liturgical, 1986), p36.