

Sunday 11th October 2020

Psalm 5: 1- 8

Acts 2: 25-42

Mission by the saints – St Aidan

I first found out about St Aidan when we called in at Durham Cathedral on our way to Scotland a few years ago; we were there for evening prayer and it happened to be 31st August, Aidan's feast day – the service talked about his life and ministry. I decided that I needed to find out more about him and that I wanted to follow his example.

In 634 Oswald became king of Northumbria. Oswald had spent some of his childhood at the monastery on Iona, so he asked them to send someone to minister to the people of his kingdom. The monk who went returned barely a year later and told the monks of the hardness of heart of the Northumbrian people, how they were stubborn and unreachable. Aidan suggested that if he had spoken more gently to the people, telling them “of the love of Christ and giving them the gospel to nourish them like milk is given to a tiny baby, then you would have won them and remained among them.” That night Aidan prayed asking God to give him springs in his heart so that he could water the land and saying that he would go and hold the people in his heart.

So, our first lessons to learn from Aidan are about being gentle and loving towards people if we want to tell them about God's love, to be prepared to speak to them in terms they can manage – not rushing in with lots of fancy theological language. Most importantly we need to pray that God will show us what to do.

Aidan travelled to Northumbria, setting up a priory on the island of Lindisfarne close to Oswald's castle at Bamburgh. While Aidan was learning the local language Oswald himself would translate and Bede recorded that that many were baptised, churches were built in several places and people flocked to hear the word of God when “Aidan was preaching and their beloved king standing by his side as interpreter, his own eyes glowing at the privilege of proclaiming the truth he loved”.

Our next lesson from Aidan and Oswald is the value of working with others and making time for what matters. Oswald probably had many things demanding his time, but he made time to ensure he could work with Aidan.

Aidan would walk from one village to another, rather than riding, giving him the time to stop and speak with whoever he met. If the person was not a Christian, he would urge them to believe and be baptised; if they were a Christian, he would strengthen their faith and inspire them to live a good and generous life. If he had companions travelling with him, he would expect them to read the bible or learn the psalms as they went.

More lessons for us here, taking the time to talk to the people we encounter (as Lynda suggested in pastoral letter 29 last week) and focussing on reading and memorising parts of the bible.

Aidan was also passionate about social justice, what money he had was used to provide room, board and education for orphans and to free slaves, many of these becoming his followers and later priests. The story is told of King Oswald holding a banquet at Easter, as Aidan blessed the food being served on a silver dish, a servant came to say that there was a crowd of needy people outside, Oswald ordered the food taken out and the silver dish broken up and distributed among them.

My final lesson for us from Aidan is to use what we have wisely and to benefit those who are less fortunate.

In conclusion, Bede who recorded much of what we know about Aidan tells us that “Aidan, bishop of Lindisfarne, ‘cultivated peace and love, purity and humility; he was above anger and greed, and despised pride and conceit; he set himself to keep and to teach the laws of God, and was diligent in study and prayer. He used his priestly authority to check the proud and powerful; he tenderly comforted the sick; he relieved and protected the poor. To sum up what could be learned from those who knew him, he took pains never to neglect anything that he had learned from the writings of the apostles and prophets, and he set himself to carry them out with all his powers.’”