

Sharing – Sunday reflective worship

Mark 1:29-39

Luke 9:1-6

Last month at this service we thought about Aidan,

If you were here you will remember that he became a missionary Bishop in Northumbria, and set his base on Lindisfarne, Holy Island, just North of Bamburgh.

He travelled far and wide talking to people and caring for them, living out teaching the Christian faith. People became Christians and churches were established. He worked hard, but, as you will recall, he needed times of rest and refreshment – when he could be alone with God. Times to be quiet as well as times to be active. And the tidal island of Lindisfarne – with its regular pattern of the tides connecting it to and separating it from the mainland was the ideal place to achieve this.

His prayer which we used last time sums it up well.

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
alone with you, God, holy to you.*

*Then with the turning of the tide
prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
the world that rushes in on me
till the waters come again and fold me back to you.*

We thought about the need to be still, and the need to be active. A time to be quiet, and a time to speak out.

And at this reflective service we have thought a lot over the past months about stillness and quiet, so tonight we are going to think about getting out there and doing.

Aidan had his mission to Northumbria - carrying God's presence into the world

So this evening I want us to think about our Northumbrias. Where is God calling us to? What is our task? Where will our action be?

I know Sarah preached last week at St James and talked about a special legacy she was left by her grandfather. Not a financial legacy, though she was left one of those too, but a legacy which has resulted in her Christian faith. When she was a child he took her to church – not the church he regularly attended, but one that had a much better provision for children. It was here she learned about Jesus and how he might help her live her life. Here she took her first steps on the journey of faith. And it was her grandfather putting himself out who helped her take those first steps on her Christian journey.

And so first this evening I want to think about who has helped us as we have come to faith. Who took time to take us to church, who invited us to a meeting, who talked to us about what the Christian faith was all about. It may of course be many different people.

I can think of someone I was at University with – his name was Dan – I haven't seen him for 40 years now and he would most likely be surprised that I remember him at all. But he took the time to invite me to a meeting at which a well known Christian evangelist – David Watson – was speaking. And that is what set me on the road to faith. There are many other people who have influenced me and helped me over the years, who have guided me further on the path. But it was because of Dan that I got on the path in the first place.

He wasn't the evangelist, he wasn't a great public speaker, he was (and probably still is) and ordinary guy, but by his invitation he gave me the opportunity to hear. And I am thankful to him for it.

So we're going to take a moment now so that you can thank whoever it was who helped you start your faith journey. Maybe a grandparent, a friend, a godparent, a neighbour, a colleague, your parents. Whoever. And we will write a name or several names on pieces of paper, post it notes, and stick them on the board at the front of church.

PAUSE (and we give God thanks for them)

We were away for the weekend a couple of weeks back at a Diocesan conference about "Leading your church into growth". Over the weekend we were challenged to take an honest and realistic look at the churches we were from. To think about where the churches have come from – how many people attended 10, 5 and 3 years ago – and where they might be going. Who would worship in them in 3 or 5 years time.

And it wasn't an encouraging thought. Because all 3 churches in this parish are getting elderly together. Numbers are falling – we might try to kid ourselves that they aren't, but let's be honest for a moment – things aren't looking so good.

But we were also challenged to think about all the people in our parishes that we have some kind of meaningful contact with. We were reminded that Jesus taught and ministered in the villages of Galilee, as in our reading this evening. These contacts are like our villages.

And for us it might be ...

Contacts through baptism, wedding and funerals – those directly involved and their families and friends

The things we do in schools – Messy Church, Open the Book, the Christmas and Easter journeys

Those who come to Jimmy Tots

The Mothers Union

Our wider families

Our next door neighbours

People who come to coffee mornings and bric a brac sales

Those we take communion to in care homes, and the others who live and work there

Those who simply drop into church for a moment's quiet

You get the picture

When we did this exercise at the weekend, we reckoned that as churches we have some sort of meaningful contact with more than 3000 people – probably if we include the families of all those children – many more than 3000 people. That's a lot of people. As an example, I took the Woodlands School Harvest service in church this last week There were 200 children and at least 100 parents. And probably those children and parents told other members of their families about what happened.

The challenge was laid down for us to invite; to welcome and to begin to share our faith. To go through these "villages" we had identified, go amongst these people we already have some kind of contact with, and invite them.

Now, many of us might baulk at the kinds of things Aidan did as he travelled around Northumbria, and think that we simply couldn't do them. But it may be all God is asking us to do is invite someone, like Dan did to me all those years ago. For us to simply give an opportunity for someone to take their first step on that Christian pathway. Perhaps our Northumbria is somewhat closer to home.

Of course it will also mean that we have to set things up – in our Sunday worship and in other activities – so that the Christian message is presented clearly. That a challenge is set out for people to respond to. And the two things – invitation and presentation – need to go hand in hand.

But its those contacts, those villages I want to think about this evening. And each of us in our roles to invite others to church or to a church based activity where something of the gospel is spoken or lived. Not too hard is it?

Maybe its someone in that list I just mentioned. Maybe its your neighbours, work colleagues, people who attend your rambling club; the person you always talk to on the bus; the person who takes you shopping or the one you take shopping. You will know.

We were challenged at the weekend to think of 5 people we could talk to; invite, take the contact further. I'm not going to ask you to think of 5 tonight – though do if you wish. But think of one.

Light a candle for them. Place the candle on the altar. Pray for them tonight and through this week and beyond. Promise that you will say something – a simple invitation maybe, a word of encouragement, an offer to pray for them if times are hard – something to help them take their first step on the faith journey. Pray that God will give you that opportunity. Trust in God – because he will be there alongside you.