

**Saints on the Edge**  
*A Small Group Study Series*



*image by Mitya Ivanov/unsplash*

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Hark how the adoring  
hosts above,  
with songs surround the throne!  
Ten thousand, thousand  
are their tongues;  
but all their hearts are one.

2 Worthy the Lamb  
that died, they cry,  
to be exalted thus;  
worthy the Lamb, let us reply;  
for he was slain for us.

5 To him who sits upon the throne,  
the God whom we adore,  
and to the Lamb that once was slain,  
be glory evermore.

3 Thou hast redeemed us  
with thy blood,  
and set the prisoners free;  
thou mad'st us  
kings and priests to God,  
and we shall reign with thee.

4 From every kindred,  
every tongue,  
thou brought'st thy chosen race;  
& distant lands & isles have shared  
the riches of thy grace.

## Introduction

This series of five sessions look at some of the people who have been declared to be saints (or are on the journey to such a declaration) - people whose lives especially pointed to God.


The Church has declared many people to be saints but we thought it would be good to look at lesser known, edgy, saints. Some of the folk we look at lived on the edge of what we now consider the centre of things. Others were edgy for other reasons - their politics, influence, the way they subverted convention or, in one case, for being a dog! Some were acclaimed by the people long before, or despite never, being proclaimed as saints by the Church.

As we read about people we, probably, have never really heard of, we think about what it might mean to be edgy saints and contemplate how they made a difference and how we might too. This series has been written by five people - the **Rev'd Professor Elizabeth Stuart**, an Anglican priest and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost of the University of Winchester. I've known Liz for years - back when she was a jobbing theologian - and one occasion she was declared a saint herself; the label hasn't, however, stuck - probably to her relief. **The Rev'd Dave Herbert**, retiring Moderator of the Northern Synod notes that: *It is impossible to live in the Northeast of England and not be aware of the Christian heritage, where the lingering spirituality and lives of the Celtic saints is hefted to the land like the sheep of upland farms in the Cheviot Hills of Northumberland. One truly walks in the footsteps of the saints as the hills, rivers, coastline and islands of the region are experienced by visitors today. Many more are coming to appreciate this landscape and rich legacy walking the many new pilgrimage routes extending their web of footpaths criss-crossing the area.* **The Rev'd Dr Jack Dyce** has an interest in all things northern and introduces us to two saints from Orkney and a royal princess turned Northumbrian abbess. **The Rev'd Dr John McNeil Scott**, Principal of the Scottish College, Irish National who has spent much of his life in the UK reflects on St Bridget and St Colmcille - another man who lived between

Ireland and Scotland. I have added some reflections: one on Catherine of Sienna who used her self-induced visions to have power in the Church, two on radical bishops from South America and on the medieval polymath Hildegard of Bingen.

We hope these reflections will stimulate you in your own journeys of sanctity. Each week there are reflections on the saints, some discussion questions, some short prayers and a hymn to conclude each week's session.

*Andy Braunston  
Minister for Digital Worship  
January 2023*

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ideal of the earliest Church in Acts 2 where all goods were shared in common has lived on in the life of monastic communities where nuns and monks take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The theory is these vows free them for ministry. What do you make of this form of Christian discipleship?</li> <li>• The URC not only ordains women but insists that women are equal to men and no churches may opt out of women's ministry – in stark contrast to, for example, the Church of England. How have you been influenced by the ministry of women in the Church?</li> </ul> |
|  | <p>Show me your ways, Lord,<br/>teach me your paths.<br/>Guide me in your truth and teach me, f<br/>or you are God my Saviour,<br/>and my hope is in all you all day long.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Psalm 24:4-5</i></p>  |



We conclude our series with Isaac Watt's great hymn of praise, Hark How the Adoring Hosts Above which reflects on the saints adoring God. This is normally set to the tune St Magnus (which has a nice resonance with our earlier study) but works spectacularly well to Lyngham (O For A Thousand Tongues). You can find it at 744 in CH4. The words are public domain and no licence is needed to reproduce them.



Hild or Hilda was the founding abbess of the monastery at Whitby, and played a highly significant role in the development of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. She served widely and was recognised for her strong and skilled leadership of both female and male houses, and for her “innate wisdom and love of the service of God” [Bede]. In one of his programmes The story of the North in the BBC radio series In Our Time, Melvyn Bragg discussed ‘the power well-born women could wield in the early [medieval] Church’.

“This work which was laid upon her she industriously performed; for she put this monastery under the same rule of monastic life as the former; and taught there the strict observance of justice, piety, chastity, and other virtues, and particularly of peace and charity; so that, after the example of the primitive Church, no one there was rich, and none poor, for they had all things common, and none had any private property. Her prudence was so great, that not only meaner men in their need, but sometimes even kings and princes, sought and received her counsel.” [Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England, c. XXIII]

Let us give thanks for the leadership of the Church, particularly the leadership of women, and for those who have worked to ensure that their perspective and gifts influence the life of the Church. Remember all those who shaped our churches and our upbringing wisely and with a longing for justice.



- What effect do you think the fact that Hild was born into a royal family had on her subsequent ministry? Is this an example of one’s privilege being used to good effect?

## Session 1 – Martyrs Magnus | Wilgefortis | Guinefort

We’re going to look at three saints who were each martyred much of whose details are lost in the mists of time. Magnus, our first saint is probably the most well documented and his bones are interred in the Cathedral dedicated to him in Kirkwall in Orkney.

### Magnús Erlendsson, martyr 1080 – 1117

*The Rev’d Dr Jack Dyce is Emeritus Professor of Nordic Theology at the Scottish College and a member of Port Glasgow URC*



Image from an article by the the BBC here <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-38892669>

Magnus's grandfather was Thorfinn Sigurdsson, also known as Thorfinn the Mighty and Earl Thorfinn. He had twin sons, Erlend and Paul, who after Thorfinn's death went on to serve as joint Earls of Orkney.



In 1098, King Magnus Barelegs of Norway took possession of Orkney and replaced Erlend and Paul as earls with his illegitimate son Sigurd. Later that same year Magnus and his cousin Håkon accompanied King Magnus Barelegs on a Viking raid on Anglesey in Wales. Håkon appears to have acquitted himself well during the Battle of Anglesey Sound, but Magnus, by now a man of considerable piety, refused to fight and was judged to be a coward by the Norwegian king. As a result, Magnus had to take refuge in mainland Scotland.

He returned to Orkney in 1105, where his cousin Håkon had been appointed Earl of Orkney. An appeal to King Eystein I of Norway, who had succeeded Magnus Barelegs in 1103, saw Magnus appointed as joint Earl of Orkney alongside his cousin Håkon. Things seem to have gone well until 1116, when the supporters of the two cousins fell out. The two sides met at the Thing (assembly) and it was agreed that in order to avoid all-out civil war the two earls would meet each other on the island of Egilsay after Easter, each bringing only two ships of supporters. The two sides would fight it out, and the winner would become the sole Earl of Orkney.

Magnus duly arrived on Egilsay with two ships, only for Håkon then to turn up with eight ships full of warriors prepared to support his cause. Magnus hid on the island overnight, but the following day was captured by Håkon's men. Magnus offered to accept exile or prison, but Håkon's supporters wanted to ensure that there was no chance he would ever return to challenge Håkon again. It was decided that Magnus should be killed.

Håkon's standard bearer, Ofeigr, refused to execute Magnus, and Håkon made his cook Lifolf kill Magnus by

describes Hilda as a woman of great energy, who was a skilled administrator and teacher. As a landowner she had many in her employ to care for sheep and cattle, farming, and woodcutting. She gained such a reputation for wisdom that kings and princes sought her advice. However, she also had a concern for ordinary folk such as Cædmon. He was a herder at the monastery, who was inspired in a dream to sing verses in praise of God. Hilda recognized his gift and encouraged him to develop it. Bede writes, "All who knew her called her mother because of her outstanding devotion and grace".

The prestige of Whitby is reflected in the fact that King Oswiu of Northumberland chose Hilda's monastery as the venue for the Synod of Whitby, the first synod of the Church in his kingdom. He invited church leaders from as far away as Wessex to attend the synod. Most of those present, including Hilda, accepted the King's decision to adopt the method of calculating Easter currently used in Rome, establishing Roman practice as the norm in Northumbria. The monks from Lindisfarne, who would not accept this, withdrew to Iona, and later to Ireland. Hilda suffered from a fever for the last seven years of her life, but she continued to work until her death on 17 November 680 AD, at what was then the advanced age of sixty-six.



Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

**Proverbs 3:13-15**



Bede in 731, who was born approximately eight years before her death. He documented much of the Christian conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Hild was born into the royal family of the Anglian Kingdom of Deiran and bought up in the court of Edwin, King of Northumbria.

Edwin converted to Christianity following his second marriage to a Kentish princess and had his entire court, including Hild, baptised. Warfare led to the death of Edwin and his wife, and Hild, returned to Kent. At the age of 33 Hild answered the call of of Bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne and returned to Northumbria to live as a nun.

Hilda's original convent is not known except that it was on the north bank of the River Wear. Here, with a few companions, she learned the traditions of Celtic monasticism, which Bishop Aidan brought from Iona. After a year Aidan appointed Hilda as the second Abbess of Hartlepool Abbey. No trace remains of this abbey, but its monastic cemetery has been found near the present St Hilda's Church, Hartlepool. In 657 Hilda became the founding abbess of Whitby Abbey; she remained there until her death. Archaeological evidence shows that her monastery was in the Celtic style, with its members living in small houses, each for two or three people. The tradition in double monasteries, such as Hartlepool and Whitby, was that men and women lived separately but worshipped together in church. The exact location and size of the church associated with this monastery is unknown.

Bede states that the original ideals of monasticism were maintained strictly in Hilda's abbey. Five men from this monastery became bishops - two became saints. Bede

striking him on the head with an axe, though only after Magnus had prayed for the souls of his executioners. Magnus was buried where he had been killed. The place then miraculously turned into a green field. Magnus was subsequently reburied at Christchurch at Birsay, on Orkney's mainland, built by his grandfather Thorfinn. This has since been replaced by St Magnus Church.

More miracles followed and a cult soon began to grow. In 1136 Bishop William of Orkney sanctified Earl Magnus, making him Saint Magnus. It is likely that St Magnus Church on Egilsay was built at this time near the site of the murder, probably as a replacement for an earlier church. Magnus's nephew, Rognvald, became Earl of Orkney in 1137 and promised to build "a stone minster at Kirkwall" in memory of Saint Magnus. The original church comprised the choir of today's St Magnus Cathedral, and on its completion St Magnus's remains were brought from Birsay and interred in a column. After his death and subsequent sainthood, St Rognvald was also interred in the cathedral.

During extensive restoration work in 1919 a skeleton was found behind stonework whose skull carried a wound consistent with the axe-blow said to have killed Magnus. Rognvald's bones had been found and re-interred during earlier work on the building in the 1800s.



Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

*Luke 23:46*



“Saint Magnus, pray for us” is the concluding line of George Mackay Brown’s autobiography *For the Islands I Sing*. Geographically, those islands are the archipelago that make up Orkney, where Magnus is an honoured part of their history. But he belongs also to the wider Norse commonwealth (his statue stands at Nidaros cathedral in Trondheim, Norway).

Born, it is believed in 1080, he came from a noble family - his grandparents were Earl Thorfinn and Ingibjorg Finnsdottir and, through them, they were related to Norwegian kings. His fame and saintly status rely in measure on his martyrdom, the miracles that followed and the foundation of the cathedral that bears his name by Rognvald, set in the centre of Kirkwall.

Earl Magnus took off his tunic and gave it to Lilof [his reluctant executioner]. ...

He prostrated himself on the ground, committing his soul to God and offering himself as a sacrifice. He prayed not only for himself and his friends, but for his enemies and murderers, forgiving them with all his heart for their crimes against him. He confessed his own sins before God, praying that his soul might be washed clean by the spilling of his blood, then placed it in God’s hands [asking that] he might be greeted by God’s angels and carried by them into the peace of paradise. ... He crossed himself and stooped to receive the blow. So his soul passed away to Heaven. [Orkneyinga Saga c.50]

to help those around us to draw closer to you.  
And if it be your will, may our actions choices and words be blessed and bear fruit,  
Whether that be hidden from us or known to us,  
according to your will,  
In Jesus name. Amen.

Finally we look at another nun/abbess from the earliest days of the Church in these islands, Hild of Whitby.

### St Hild of Whitby, abbess (614 – 680)



*The Rev’d Dr Jack Dyce is Emeritus Professor of Nordic Theology at the Scottish College and a member of Port Glasgow URC*





image from CatholicIreland.net

Hild was an important figure in the Christianisation of Anglo-Saxon England, she was abbess at several monasteries and recognised for the wisdom that drew kings to her for advice. The source of information about Hilda is the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by



|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p>Bede. Bede recorded James “had a wide knowledge of church music; and when peace was at length restored to the province and the number of believers increased, he began to teach many people to sing the music of the Church after the uses of Rome and Canterbury. At last, old and full of days as the Scripture says, he went the way of his fathers.” (And mothers!). What a legacy from someone never in the ecclesiastical limelight, but who left a spiritual song in the hearts of many he encountered. May we each play our part, humbly, offering up to God what little we may feel we can bring to the table, and like the loaves and fishes at the feeding miracles, pray that God will bless and amplify our every action beyond our hopes and dreams.</p> |
|    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might you have felt in James’ place with a Christian king killed in battle, a pagan resurgence, and powerful figures withdraw leaving him to find his own way in ministry?</li> <li>• How might converts have perceived James? They’d not be converting with the hope of preferment at court after all.</li> <li>• To me James speaks of the Gospel at work in weakness – away from the trappings of power and force – how might this type of ministry be relevant now?</li> </ul>   |
|  | <p>God who calls,<br/> thank you for all the experience gifts<br/> sown into our lives,<br/> teach us to use them freely, selflessly<br/> and without fuss to your glory.<br/> Help us to tell our stories and that of others</p>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norse history is something that is often bewildering to those of us who aren’t used to it – the names seem odd and it’s all a bit confusing despite England being ruled by Danes for some time before the Norman Conquest. Magnus seems a bit like a warlord – albeit a rather reluctant one. How might we reconcile the use of violence with our faith in the One who told us to turn the other cheek?</li> <li>• Magnus clearly struggled to live out his faith and occupy a position of leadership and do what was expected of him. What are the pitfalls and opportunities of secular leadership for committed religious folk?</li> <li>• Is it possible, by building a church in his honour and interring his bones at the church, that Ronald, his nephew was misusing Magnus’ memory and heroic sanctity? If so how?</li> </ul> |
|  | <p>St Magnus offered his transient power and riches in this world for the glory of God’s kingdom, not for himself only but on behalf of the people of Orkney and the north, and of all people everywhere: So we now offer thankfully the fruits of our various labour.</p> <p><i>[St Magnus Prayer in Ron Ferguson: George Mackay Brown. The Wound and the Gift]</i></p>  |

Now we turn to another martyr who lived a few hundred years after Magnus.

## St Wilgefortis

*The Rev'd Professor Elizabeth Stuart, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, The University of Winchester and Associate Priest in the Parish of St Matthew with St Paul in Winchester*



*St Wilgefortis in the Museum of the Diocese Graz-Seckau in Graz, Austria.  
Photo by Gugganij, Creative Commons Licence.*



Also known in Britain as St Uncumber, St Wilgefortis became a popular saint in the fourteenth century. A daughter of a pagan Portuguese king and a Christian mother, the saint endeavoured to stave off marriage by taking a vow of chastity. When her father nevertheless betrothed her to a Moorish king, St Wilgefortis prayed that she would be made repulsive. Her prayers were

James, “a man of great energy and repute in Christ’s Church, who lived until our own day”.



### **Matthew 27: 32**

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.



James was never made a Saint – and remains one of Church history’s unsung heroes, with only fleeting references and a low profile. Like Simon of Cyrene, he had a ‘bit part’ in God’s unfolding plan. But there are no ‘bit parts’ in God’s kingdom. However obscure, anonymous, minor a part we each feel we have to play, every action driven by Christian love has the potential to touch and transform beyond our own immediate understanding and appreciation of what we have just done.

What we do know is that James experienced Christian life on the edge after the reign of King Edwin came to a brutal and sudden end in battle. Pagan rule followed. Queen Aethelberga retreated to the relatively safer climes of Kent, along with her long-standing chaplain Paulinus. However, Deacon James remained behind, up north, in harm’s way and vulnerable: teaching and baptising for many years after, using a village near Catterick as his base. He is often seen as the one true hero of the Gregorian Mission who did not follow the safety and worldly allure of royal patronage, as many in the mission did when things went wrong. A brave decision.

Happily Deacon James lived a long life, and quite possibly passed on a lot of his story and that of others to

We return now to the early Church in England as we look at an unsung hero who had visions of peace.

**Deacon James (c600 – c672)**

*The Rev'd Dave Herbert is Moderator of the Northern Synod*

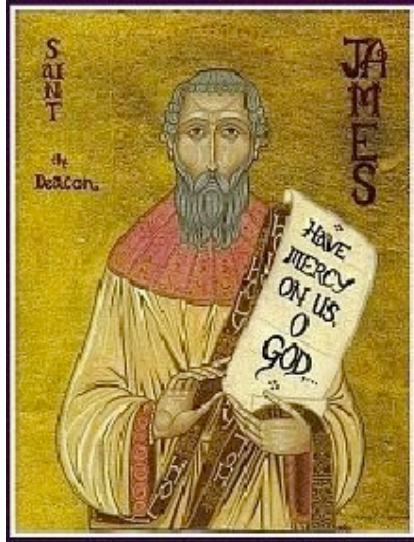


image from <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2018/10/saint-james-deacon.html>



There is a river in north Northumberland near Crookham called Pallinsburn, named after Paulinus, who was a key figure in Pope Gregory the Great's mission to these islands in the late 6th century, before the monastic community on Holy Island had been conceived. Working northwards from Canterbury, the Gregorian mission reached the far north of what is today's Northumberland, where Paulinus led a very successful ministry of evangelism as chaplain to the Northumbrian King Edwin's wife, Aethelberga at Ad Gefrin ("Hill of the Goats"), a royal palace at the foot of the Cheviot Hills. Paulinus baptised thousands of people in local rivers. Bede, in his Ecclesiastical History of the English People, tells of how Paulinus was assisted by a deacon called

answered, and she grew a beard which caused her fiancé to break off the marriage and her father to have her crucified. Never officially canonised by the Church, she became popular among women desiring to be rid of abusive husbands. An image of St Wilgefortis is to be found carved in the Henry VII chapel in Westminster Abbey where she sports an impressive beard. Images of her elsewhere show her typically tied to a cross. Her feast was celebrated on 20 July.



**John 20: 17**

"Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"



The name 'Wilgefortis' is believed to come from the Latin *virgo fortis*, 'strong virgin'. There is a historic tension in Christianity between two traditions, one in which men are valorised over women and another in which women claim authority and equality as disciples of Christ. Throughout Christian history many women have done the latter by eschewing marriage and entering into monastic life.

For most of its history Christianity privileged the monastic over other types of life and it is only in relatively recent history that marriage has come to be almost identified with Christian discipleship.


Yet, Jesus' own life and ministry did not focus on marriage, and it is possible to read in his post-resurrection encounter with Mary Magdalene, the first witness of his rising, a deliberate reversal of Genesis

2.24, where a man leaves his father and mother and 'clings' to his wife, and they become one flesh.

In the resurrection there is no clinging, no marriage, relationships between men and women are changed. It is unwise then to invest marriage with too much theological significance, as it is equally unwise to over-valorise the celibate life. In truth, both forms of life can be holy and a powerful witness to God's love, and both forms of life can be sinful but identifying either too closely with discipleship risks failing to see the sin when it occurs and trapping people in destructive relationships.

St Wilgefortis reminds us that God wants women (as well as men) to flourish in whatever life they are called to and to be free of the expectations and structures of patriarchy.


Wilgefortis's bearded face on her crucified woman's body also reminds us that 'in Christ there is no male and female' (Galatians 3.28), that something radical happens to gender in Christ, it has no ultimate status, it is not determinative of our relationship with God and therefore it should not be used to treat men and women differently in Church or wider society.




- Why might women in earlier stages of European history – and often now in the developing world – see the convent as a meaningful life choice?
- There's lots of debate about gender these days as roles traditionally ascribed to one or other gender change and there is often more fluidity than there once appeared to be. What do you think of Liz' assertion that in Christ something radical happens

alternative to a life of child rearing or the confines of the convent. Yet finding her freedom came at a terrible cost. Her mysticism coupled with an justifiable reluctance to follow a vocation as either nun or mother led to powerful choices, visions and consequences. Intense love of God came at a dreadful cost.

Pray today for women who have few choices now that we may work towards an ever more free world.



- Do you think Catherine knew what she was doing – ie she realised that starving herself gave her visions, ceased her menstrual cycle and allowed her visions to be taken seriously and give her power? Why/why not?
- Can you think of examples now where we might behave in strange or disruptive ways in order to gain power and authority in an unfair world?
- What effect do you think Catherine's family life as a child had on her as an adult? What might these mean for how we nurture children in our midst?



Eternal God, eternal Trinity...  
 ...You are a mystery as deep as the sea;  
 the more I search, the more I find,  
 and the more I find the more I search for You.  
 But I can never be satisfied;  
 what I receive will ever leave me desiring more.  
 When You fill my soul I have an ever-greater hunger,  
 and I grow more famished for Your light.  
 I desire above all to see You,  
 the true light, as you really are. Amen.

*Catherine of Siena*



Catherine used fasting and refusing to be attractive to men as ways to find autonomy in a patriarchal world. The visions of this deeply religious woman increased her reputation for sanctity. Making the most of the opportunities provided to her, she ended up goading one pope to return to Rome and bolstered the contested claims of his successor. Sadly, the source of her authority - her ability to fast - led to her premature death. Now we'd say she suffered from anorexia; even then her friends implored her to eat.

I wonder if she:

- realised the link between her lack of nutrition and the visions she had.
- understood that the visions gave her authority.
- deliberately used these things to gain power and authority in a patriarchal world.
- comprehended that these things which gave her power also made her ill.

Of course opportunities for women in mediaeval Europe weren't plentiful. Thankfully we all have many more choices now. Different ways of being women, and men, allow for greater freedom, yet I wonder if we fall into the same trap of using our power to dominate and our weakness to manipulate. I wonder if we use inappropriate tools to gain power and influence and find that those very same tools consume us just as they consumed Catherine.

Catherine, like St Paul, was a mystic at heart. Inspired visions changed her, and the Church; just as Paul's vision of the Risen Christ changed him and the Church. In faith Catherine found resources to sustain and give her an

to gender and her sense of what follows from that?

- There is much tragedy in Wilgefortis' story – not allowed to follow her own dreams, having to conform to patriarchal norms and being killed by her father. As such we see in her life echoes of what happens to many women now. Why do you think our world seems to tolerate male violence to women? What might your church do about this?



We give thanks this day for strong women and we pray for strength for all those trapped in destructive relationships. We pray that the day will come when all no matter what their gender will enjoy the glorious liberty of your children. Amen.

And we turn to a rather more puzzling saint, also a martyr, but one acclaimed by the people and definitely note by the Church authorities!

## St Guinefort

*The Rev'd Professor Elizabeth Stuart, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, The University of Winchester and Associate Priest in the Parish of St Matthew with St Paul in Winchester*



*A modern depiction of St Guinefort by L Bower used with permission*

This saint is so on the edge that he falls off the perimeter of orthodoxy and acceptability for many. He is St Guinefort, the holy greyhound.

In the thirteenth century a Dominican monk named Etienne de Bourbon documented, in disapproving terms, the cult of this French furry saint. The story goes that a knight and his family left their dog, Guinefort, in charge of the baby in their castle near Lyon. Returning, they found the nursery in disarray, the child absent and the dog with blood on his face. Everyone assumed the dog had killed the baby and so the knight immediately slaughtered it. But then he heard the cries of his child,



parents wished her to marry Bonaventura's widower. Catherine opposed this and following her sister's example went on a strict fast as a protest to her parents' plans. She also cut her long hair short as a protest against her mother's chiding to improve her appearance so as to find a husband. Although opposed to marriage Catherine did not want to enter a convent and, instead, became a lay member of the Dominican order - though feigned illness was used to persuade her mother to let her join. This lay movement, the Mantallate, taught Catherine to read and write; she lived in near total solitude and prayer in her home and refused most of the food provided for her. Her visions continued and, encouraged by her confessor, she entered public life and soon drew a following urging for reform of the Church and a more godly clergy. She tried to convince the last Avignon based pope, Gregory XI to return to Rome and she was used by a new pope, Urban VI to bolster his legitimacy. Her life was considered holy as her limited diet meant she ceased to menstruate (and so was seen to have escaped the 'limitations' of her sex and her visions were orthodox and of Christ and the saints.) Her fasting, now we'd call it anorexia, led to her premature death at the age of just 33. She was declared a saint in 1461.



### **2 Corinthians 12: 2 - 4**

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows — was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

Session 5 Visions of A Different World  
 Catherine | Deacon James | Hild

St Catherine of Siena (25 March 1347 – 29 April 1380)

*The Rev'd Andy Braunston is the Minister of Digital Worship  
 and a member of the Peedie Kirk URC in Orkney*



*painting by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo - Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Bilddatenbank.*



Catherine of Siena was born to middle class parents - her father had his own cloth dying business and her mother was the daughter of a local poet. Lapa, Catherine's mother, already had 22 children when Catherine and her twin were born; sadly her twin died. Following a vision of Christ Catherine vowed, aged just 7 years old, to devote her life to God. When Catherine was 16 her older sister, Bonaventura, died in childbirth and her

upturned his cradle and found him safe, the body of a viper nearby.

Realising that his hound had saved his child's life by killing the viper, the knight buried his dog in a well, creating a leafy shrine there to his honour. This did not prevent the destruction of his castle which some attributed to divine intervention on behalf of the wronged Guinefort.

Locals soon began to venerate the dog as a martyr and saint, and he became particularly associated with the healing of sick children.

Devotional practices around the saint seem to have been the typical mix of Christian mixed with pre-Christian. Etienne de Bourbon tried to stamp all that out by extracting the holy remains from the well and burning them. But such piety is not easily quelled, and devotion to St Guinefort continued for several centuries, the last known devotions being recorded in the 1940s.

In recent decades St Guinefort and his cult have been the subject of a film and a novel and, in 2021 a St Guinefort's Day parade took place in San Francisco on the 22 August (his feast day) involving many dogs.

**Psalm 148: 7-14**



Praise the LORD from the earth,  
 you sea monsters and all deeps,  
 fire and hail, snow and frost,  
 stormy wind fulfilling his command!  
 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle,  
 creeping things and flying birds!  
 Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
 princes and all rulers of the earth!  
 Young men and women alike, old and young together!  
 Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
 for his name alone is exalted;  
 his glory is above earth and heaven.  
 He has raised up a horn for his people,  
 praise for all his faithful,  
 for the people of Israel who are close to him.  
 Praise the LORD!

The thought that an animal could be a saint was preposterous to Etienne de Bourbon. His contemporary, St Thomas Aquinas, had concluded that human beings were the only creatures able to make moral choices and therefore the only creatures capable of saintly acts.

But, if we think of saints as those through whom the light of Christ shines so strongly that we feel that we have encountered God in them, then it is not that surprising that some see that light shining through other creatures. The great mystic Thomas Merton regarded the inconspicuous little yellow flowers on the side of the road, the leaf, the lakes, the sea and mountain all as saints, beings through whom God's glory shines and whose existence is praise of their creator.

What some people recognised in St Guinefort was something of Christ's sacrificial nature. He laid down his life for another and in the process became an innocent



Holy Spirit, bringing light into dark places, igniting praise,  
 greatest gift, our Hope and Encourager, Holy Spirit of Christ,  
 I praise you! Amen.

*Hildebard of Bingen*



We end this sessions by singing Fred Pratt Green's lovely reflection on the saints:

**Rejoice in God's Saints, Today And All Days!**

© 1973 Hope Publishing Company, CCL Licence 1064776  
 Tunes Laudate Dominum (O Praise Ye The Lord) or Hannover (O Worship the King) CH4 742,



Rejoice in God's saints,  
 today and all days!  
 A world without saints  
 forgets how to praise.  
 Their faith in acquiring  
 the habit of prayer,  
 Their depth of adoring,  
 Lord, Help us to share.

3 Rejoice in those saints,  
 unpraised and unknown,  
 Who bear someone's cross,  
 or shoulder their own:  
 They share our complaining,  
 our comforts, our cares:  
 What patience in caring,  
 what courage, is theirs!

2 Some march with events  
 to turn them God's way;  
 Some need to withdraw,  
 the better to pray;  
 Some carry the gospel  
 through fire and through flood:  
 Our world is their parish:  
 their purpose is God.

4 Rejoice in God's saints,  
 today and all days!  
 A world without saint  
 forgets how to praise.  
 In loving, in living,  
 they prove it is true:  
 Their way of self-giving, Lord,  
 leads us to you.



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|   | <p>no doubt the historians yet to come, but we strive, just as Hildegard did, just as all our saints have done, to be faithful to the One who calls us.</p>   |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why might Hildegard have put herself down in her writings yet, at the same time, expound on a range of academic subjects?</li> <li>• Hildegard didn't seem to have to argue for her place in the Church – she seems to have just taken it (though I imagine there were struggles along the way). Does that approach have problems, pitfalls or pleasures?</li> <li>• What might you want to reform in the contemporary Church? And why?</li> </ul>   |
|  | <p>Holy Spirit, comforting fire, life of all creation.<br/>Anointing the sick, cleansing body and soul, fill this body!</p> <p>Holy Spirit, sacred breath, fire of love, sweetest taste,<br/>beautiful aroma,<br/>Fill this heart!</p> <p>Holy Spirit, filling the world, from the heights to the deep,<br/>raining from clouds, filling rivers and sea, fill this mind!</p> <p>Holy Spirit, forgiving and giving,<br/>uniting strangers, reconciling enemies,<br/>seeking the lost, and enfolding us together, fill these gathered here!</p> |

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|  | <p>victim of injustice. They will also have seen in this canine something of Christ's concern for children.</p> <p>In a theological context which valorised the rational, and a social context which was hierarchical and oppressive, the local peasants may have also seen themselves in Guinefort a non-intellectual oppressed by the nobility. In declaring this dog a saint the locals were pushing back against a Church which was promoting the mind over body and a social order which impoverished and oppressed many.</p> <p>Seeing and learning something of God in our brother and sister creatures is an intrinsic part of the Wisdom tradition in the Hebrew scriptures, a tradition in which Jesus was embedded. He frequently drew on non-human creatures in his teachings and referred to himself as a mother hen. Others saw him as the lamb of God.</p> <p>If all creation bristles with the glory of God and the light of Christ can shine through our sister and brother creatures, this must have implications for the way in which we relate to them and treat them. This is a hard thing to think about because so much of human life is bound up with the exploitation of our non-human siblings. But the holy hound St Guinefort encourages us to think deeply about these questions. What a good boy! Pray today for all God's non-human creatures and for an end to their exploitation and cruel treatment and give thanks for all the joy our companion animals bring to our lives.</p> |
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- Why might the Church hierarchy opposed canonising a dog?
- What, if any, is the distinction between humans and animals? Are we (humans) simply another animal?
- Is it right that we exploit animals to sustain our way of life?



Dear God, protect and bless all beings that breathe, keep all evil from them, and let them sleep in peace. Amen.

*(Albert Schweitzer)*



We end our first session by singing the hymn: For All Our Saints written in 1864 by William Walsham How. The tune is *Sine Nomine* found at Rejoice and Sing 658 (CH4 740, StF 745, MP 148) The words are now public domain and no licence is needed to reproduce them.

For all the saints  
 who from their labours rest,  
 who thee by faith  
 before the world confessed,  
 thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.  
 Alleluia! Alleluia!

3 Oh, blest communion,  
 fellowship divine!  
 We feebly struggle,  
 they in glory shine;  
 yet all are one in thee,  
 for all are thine. Alleluia! Alleluia!

2 Thou wast their rock,  
 their fortress, and their might;  
 thou, Lord, their captain  
 in the well-fought fight;  
 thou, in the darkness drear, their  
 one true light.  
 Alleluia! Alleluia!

4: The golden evening  
 brightens in the west;  
 soon, soon to faithful warriors  
 cometh rest;  
 sweet is the calm  
 of paradise the blest.  
 Alleluia! Alleluia!



Hildegade is an interesting figure. A powerful Abbess who often put herself down, yet displayed formidable learning and authority. A woman with intense feelings towards another nun yet who wrote the most fierce condemnation of sexual relationships between those of the same sex (Scivias 78). A preacher calling for reform of morals yet who wrote passionate poetry to the Blessed Virgin Mary. A devoted daughter of the Church who had no issues getting an Archbishop to overrule her abbot or write to popes. A nun who wanted no distinctions of social rank in her convents, yet banned postulants unless they were from the nobility! Hildegard knew how to get her own way; she knew how to have authority in a patriarchal world. Her nuns were devoted to her; one isn't sure what her bishops felt! She knew how to stay rooted within the tradition yet also called for its reform

As Reformed Christians we pride ourselves on living out the Reformation tag that the Reformed Church is always being reformed by the Word of God. We find we struggle as we wrestle with being loyal to the tradition yet finding new ways in which the Word speaks to us. Over the last hundred years or so the ordination of women, acceptance of divorce and remarriage, the place of LGBT folk in the life of the Church, and the insights that the two thirds world bring, have all been ways in which this struggle between faithfulness and reform have played out for us.

Like Hildegard we can all be full of contradictions. We can be radical in some ways and deeply conservative in others. We can be contradictory in our approaches to ethics, Scripture, tradition, and authority - just as Hildegard was. We can infuriate those around us, and

clergy and laity in chapter houses and in public, mainly denouncing clerical corruption and calling for reform.

Although the history of her formal canonization is complicated, regional calendars of the Roman Catholic church have listed her as a saint for centuries. On 7 October 2012 Pope Benedict named her a Doctor of the Church, in recognition of "her holiness of life and the originality of her teaching."

### Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The Kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."



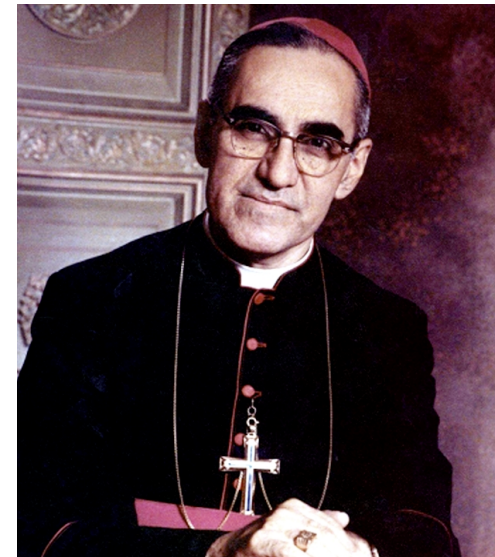
5: But, lo! there breaks  
a yet more glorious day;  
the saints triumphant  
rise in bright array;  
the King of glory passes on his way.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

6: From earth's wide bounds,  
from ocean's farthest coast,  
through gates of pearl streams in  
the countless host,  
singing to Father, Son,  
and Holy Ghost, Alleluia! Alleluia!

## Session 2 – Radicals Romero | Day | Camara

### St Oscar Romero

*The Rev'd Andy Braunston is the Minister of Digital Worship and a member of the Peedie Kirk in Orkney*



By Arzobispado de San Salvador; Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum -  
[https://anep.or.cr/media/uploads/fotos/cyclope1\\_sin\\_cat/Romeroao4282\\_big.png](https://anep.or.cr/media/uploads/fotos/cyclope1_sin_cat/Romeroao4282_big.png),  
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Oscar Romero (15 August 1917 – 24 March 1980) was a Catholic priest and bishop in El Salvador. In 1980, he was shot dead by an assassin while celebrating Mass.

Romero attended a junior seminary from the age of 13 and then the national seminary in El Salvador gaining a degree in theology before undertaking a doctorate in Rome and being ordained in 1942.

For over 20 years he devoted himself to parish ministry before becoming rector of a seminary and then secretary to the Bishops' Conference. He also edited a diocesan newspaper and pursued a conservative line in pushing the traditional teaching of the Church.

Ordained a bishop in 1970 he served as an auxiliary bishop before being appointed archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. Many priests were disappointed in his appointment fearing he'd restrict their work with the poor and their critique of their society which owed much to Marxist ideology. However, on 12 March 1977, Rutilio Grande, a Jesuit priest, and personal friend of Romero, who had been creating self-reliance groups among the poor, was assassinated. His death had a profound impact on Romero, who later stated: "When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead I thought, 'If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.'" Romero urged the government to investigate, but they ignored his request. Furthermore, the censored press remained silent.

In response to Grande's murder, Romero revealed an activism that had not been evident earlier, speaking out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations, and torture. In May 1979, Romero met with Pope John Paul II and unsuccessfully attempted to obtain a Vatican



Hildegard of Bingen was a German Benedictine abbess and polymath active as a writer, composer, philosopher, mystic, visionary, and as a medical writer and practitioner during the High Middle Ages. She is one of the best-known composers of sacred monophony, as well as the most recorded in modern history. She has been considered by scholars to be the founder of scientific natural history in Germany. Hildegard's convent elected her as mother superior in 1136. She founded the monasteries of Rupertsberg in 1150 and Eibingen in 1165. Hildegard wrote theological, botanical, and medicinal works, as well as letters, hymns, and antiphons for the liturgy. She wrote poems, and supervised miniature illuminations in the Rupertsberg manuscript of her first work, *Scivias*. There are more surviving chants by Hildegard than by any other composer from the entire Middle Ages, and she is one of the few known composers to have written both the music and the words. One of her works, the *Ordo Virtutum*, is an early example of liturgical drama and arguably the oldest surviving morality play. She is noted for the invention of a constructed language known as *Lingua Ignota*.

Hildegard had an intense friendship with another nun, Ricardis, and wrote demeaning herself whilst, at the same time, giving learned commentary on a range of subjects. In an age which severely limited women's education and academic interests Hildegard stands out. The acceptance of public preaching by a woman, even a well-connected abbess and acknowledged prophet, does not fit the stereotype of her time. Her preaching was not limited to the monasteries; she preached publicly in 1160 in Germany. She conducted four preaching tours throughout Germany, speaking to both



Send us leaders of integrity  
whose souls are open to you, O God,  
and whose hearts are set on love of others.  
Help us to crave the power of grace, not force,  
and to work for a world  
whose ways are ways of gentleness  
and whose paths are all of peace. Amen

Now we turn to the legendary exploits of a German woman who lived 500 or so years after Brigid and Elizabeth.

### Hildegard of Bingen 1098 – 1179

*The Rev'd Andy Braunston is the Minister for Digital Worship  
and member of the Peedie Kirk URC in Kirkwall, Orkney.*



*Hildegard receiving a vision  
Unknown author - Miniature from the Rupertsberg Codex of Liber Scivias.*

condemnation of the Salvadoran military regime for committing human rights violations and its support of death squads. He expressed his frustration in working with clergy who cooperated with the government but was told by Pope John Paul II to maintain episcopal unity as a top priority. Romero condemned the persecution of the Church where it worked to help the poor and gained a huge following due to his weekly sermons broadcast on a Church radio station which became a rare source of accurate news. His diocesan newspaper also detailed acts of repression by the armed forces.

In March 1980 he called on the armed forces to stop killing people; he was assassinated later that month whilst saying mass. The people declared him a saint immediately; whilst John Paul II started the process of canonization it was stalled until Francis canonised him in 2018.



### Isaiah 53: 8 – 9

By a perversion of justice he was taken away.  
Who could have imagined his future?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people.  
They made his grave with the wicked  
and his tomb with the rich,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.



I first encountered Liberation Theology, which mined the deep Scriptural truths of condemnation of the rich and a preferential option for the poor, as a student in the late 1980s. I was attracted to this reading of the Bible as, after all, we follow the One who told the rich to give away all they had and who was arrested, tried, and executed as a result.

Catholics have long held oppression sinful and told the powerful to treat others with love, care, and respect - the evening prayer of the Church always contains the radical words of the Magnificat. The Church, however, was uneasy with Liberationists who used Marxist analysis to critique society as Marx belittled the spiritual aspect of life, only being concerned with the material.

Romero is an interesting character - theologically conservative but radicalised by oppression. Supporters of liberation theology hail Romero as their hero yet he was, by repute, not very interested in it! Instead, he faithfully adhered to Catholic teaching on liberation and a preferential option for the poor but rejected a Marxist analysis of society. He clearly desired a social revolution but one based on interior reform.

Romero was influenced by Pope Paul VI who taught that the proclamation of the Kingdom is not to be replaced by the proclamation of liberation. Paul VI taught all human ideologies, if their goal is not to find liberation in Christ, contain within them the seeds of their own destruction.

Romero's suspicion of the ideology behind Liberation Theology did not stop him working to end oppression, ease the burden on the poor, and challenge the

power and authority were conferred upon him externally – by the army – represented by his lance. He used his power to protect other external authorities, the monarchy and Church (by adding to the number of its baptised members), the latter by fear.

All of Elisabeth's power came from within. She did not have the might of the imperial army behind her – just her own spittle and feet – which she used for no other purpose than to claim her home. It is the authority of integrity, of openness to, and dependence upon, God. It is the kind of authority Jesus manifested and it is authority demonstrated by the Canaanite woman who dared to challenge Jesus for the sake of her daughter. This is not the authority of force or of institutional power but the authority of the self, a self open to God.



- Liz contrasts the power of St George with his lance and army with the power of Elizabeth the wonderworking nun who's power came from within. Is Elizabeth's power more attractive? Why/why not?
- Notwithstanding a certain sympathy for the dragon in the story – who had found a nice cave to live in – dragons are used in stories often as symbols of problems, things to be defeated. What dragons does the Church now have? How might they be defeated?
- Liz references the Gospel story of the feisty pagan woman who challenged Jesus. What do you make of that story?

and was refusing to budge. Armed only with a crucifix, St Elisabeth stood barefoot before the convent and summoned the dragon out, whereupon she defeated the beast by spitting upon it and then trampling it with her feet. Her feast day is 24 April.

**St Matthew 15: 21-28**




Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

St Elisabeth's feast day comes a day after that of another, much better known, dragon-slayer, St George. Their stories invite comparison and I think represent two types of authority. St George was a soldier, a tribune from Cappadocia who went into battle with the dragon to save the life of the daughter of a king who had been offered up to the dragon when the supply of sheep used to keep it sweet had run dry. He wounded the dragon with a lance, saved the princess, and then, with her, led the dragon on a leash into the town saying he would only slay the dragon if all would be baptised. George's



powerful. The fact he was not a Marxist did not stop him being killed by the state and acclaimed by the people.

We can use many sociological and philosophical tools to understand, and critique, our society but, in the end, like Romero we need to return, again and again, to the Gospel as the prism through which we see and interpret the world.



- Recently a government minister, annoyed that the Archbishop of Canterbury had criticised the plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda accused the Archbishop of preaching from his pulpit...(he meant to say "preaching politics" but didn't! Is it ok for ministers to address contemporary political issues in sermons, services, and reflections? Is it ok for the Church to speak out on such matters?
- What do you think of Pope John Paul II's attitude to Romero's annoyance with priests and bishops who collaborated with a murderous government? Why might he have been keen to keep the Church in El Salvador united?
- House Church leader Gerald Coates is reported to have said that nothing changes our theology as much as our experience! He meant it about a Penteocostal expression of Church but his saying could also apply to Romero's conversion to protecting the poor and speaking out against a murderous regime. In what ways has your experience changed your views on religion and God?



O Most High,  
we proclaim Your greatness,  
Your glory in the heavens above  
and in all Your people here below.  
You have done mighty things for us.

O Ancient of Days,  
You scatter the proud  
in the imagination of their hearts,  
cast the mighty from their thrones,  
send the rich away empty,  
lift up the humble, and feed the hungry.

O God of our ancestors, help us to do the same. Amen.

We now turn to another Catholic from the American continent, this time a lay woman from the United States.

### Dorothy Day, Servant of God

*The Rev'd Andy Braunston is the Minister of Digital Worship and a member of the Peedie Kirk in Orkney*



Photo Mottke Weisman, Loaves and Fishes

### St Elisabeth the Wonderworker

*The Rev'd Professor Elizabeth Stuart, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, The University of Winchester and Associate Priest in the Parish of St Matthew with St Paul in Winchester.*




Icon of St Elisabeth the Wonderworker from the Orthodox Church of America's website, <http://oca.org/> and used with their kind permission.




Born around the fifth century in Heraklea, St Elisabeth the Wonderworker showed early signs of holiness. By the age of three she could recite the lives of the saints. When her parents died, she gave their wealth to the poor and entered a convent in Constantinople where she pursued a life of extreme asceticism. At some point the Emperor Leo I gave St Elisabeth a convent. However, she was unable to take possession of the building for her community because a dragon had taken up residence



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|   | <p>father's property – but was she on to a Gospel value? What stops us all with following this particular command of Jesus?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brigid was aware of the pagan values and practices around her and incorporated some into her monastery – like the holy fire. What values and practices in our world now might we use for missionary purposes?</li> </ul>  |
|  | <p>We give you thanks, O God,<br/>that old stories half-remembered,<br/>re-created, passed down and loved,<br/>of place and people,<br/>still have the ability to inspire and feed<br/>the souls of the nations.<br/>We think of Brigid, a woman of peace,<br/>and all who have brought harmony to conflict,<br/>light to the darkness, hope to the downcast,<br/>surprise to the confident and the powerful.<br/>May the cloak of peace<br/>cover those who are troubled and anxious.<br/>Inspire us to act justly and to reverence<br/>all God has made.<br/>Strengthen what is weak within us.<br/>Calm us into a quietness that heals and listens.<br/>May we grow each day into greater wholeness in mind,<br/>body and spirit. Amen.</p> |

At a similar time to Brigid in Ireland another woman was doing interesting things over in Constantinople....

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|  | <p>Dorothy Day (November 8, 1897 – November 29, 1980) was an American journalist, social activist, and anarchist who, after a bohemian youth, became a Catholic without abandoning her social and anarchist activism.</p> <p>Raised in a nominally Christian home she started to attend an Episcopal Church as a child and was drawn by the liturgy and music being baptised and confirmed in 1911. She graduated high school but dropped out of university and moved to New York to work on various socialist periodicals. She celebrated the Russian revolution and became active in the women's suffrage movement.</p> <p>She had an unhappy affair which led to an abortion and in 1920 entered into a civil marriage which lasted only a year. In the mid 1920s she took another lover and had a child with him but, at the same time, became more and more interested in Catholicism. Her partner refused to marry her due to his antipathy to organised religion and they split but remained lifelong friends.</p> <p>Day was received into the Catholic Church in December 1927. The effects of the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression led Day to wish the Catholics would organise on behalf of the workers like the Communists did: "I could write, I could protest, to arouse the conscience, but where was the Catholic leadership in the gathering of bands of men and women together, for the actual works of mercy that the comrades had always made part of their technique in reaching the workers?"</p> <p>She met the French radical Peter Maurin and, with him, founded the <i>Catholic Worker</i> - a cheap newspaper</p> |
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designed to help the working class organise and to promote radical Catholic social thought. In this newspaper, Day advocated the Catholic economic theory of distributism, which she considered a third way between capitalism and socialism.

Despite its uncomfortable radicalism the hierarchy supported the paper as a useful, to them, buffer against the Communist, *Daily Worker*. Day, and the Catholic Worker, adopted a pacifist position meaning their circulation and popularity dropped during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

Day's pacifism was a hallmark of her campaigning and writing for the rest of her life. She praised the reforms of the Second Vatican Council particularly its declaration that nuclear weapons were incompatible with Christian teaching. She was very critical of the counter cultural hippie movement of the 1960s and 70s seeing them as middle class people who had not really suffered. She was intolerant of the promiscuity and drug use she perceived in that movement. She died in 1980 of a heart attack and was declared a Servant of God (the first step on the path to sainthood) in 2000.



**James 5: 1 - 5**



Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have


A symbol attributed to her has become emblematic of Ireland. For many centuries and until now a distinctive cross, made from woven rushes, has been displayed in Irish homes as a simple object of devotion and talisman of protection. To this day every Irish child learns to weave one in primary school and hears the tales of the saint whose name it bears.



Brigid's life was lived at the turning of the ages in Ireland as Druidic ways yielded to Christian devotion. She entered culture in gentle but indelible ways and carried a story of female devotion that was compassionate and transgressive. Her contemporary ability to express progressive religious impulses in Irish culture might tell us that our world is not as 'secular' as we it may feel to be and that there are resources in our cultures and memories that can be resurrected and repurposed in service of the Kingdom.





- In previous generations of Christians there was a lot of store set by talismans or symbols of the holy – like St Brigid's Cross – which allowed folk to have a sense of the holy in everyday life. The Reformers took a rather dim view of these things seeing them as superstitious charms yet even now people want to find ways to experience the holy in everyday life. What helps you do this? (A touching cross in your pocket, a Bible, a prayer app on your phone?)
- The use of the Lectionary is now widespread which means on any given Sunday most of the world's Christians listen to the same readings (and maybe similar sermons!) Why then do we not give away all we have to the poor when that reading comes up?! Brigid was certainly generous – albeit with her

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|   | <p>abbey that she founded, a double monastery with separate quarters for men and women, was ruled over jointly by an abbess (Brigid being the first) and a bishop-abbot. It became a centre of learning whose influence extended across the European mainland. The site of the monastery had formerly been a pagan shrine where a sacred fire was kept perpetually burning. Rather than stamping out this pagan flame, Brigid and her nuns kept it burning as a Christian symbol.</p>   |
|     | <p><b>Matthew 25:31-36</b></p> <p>‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that 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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”</p> |
|  | <p>Brigid’s example – a clever, proud, determined woman of power and compassion – continues to have purchase in secular Ireland. From this year forward Ireland has a new public holiday, to be marked each year on the first Friday of February . It is St Brigid’s Day, to mark the first day of spring and a new Celtic year. Perhaps there is life and meaning to be had from the old stories still!</p>  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p>reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.</p>  |
|  | <p>Sainthood is a funny old thing. We think of the saints as holy folk whose lives of heroic virtue inspire us to live more holy lives. Of course this is part of what the Church does in declaring someone to be a saint. The Church also controls the narrative, and its interpretation, when it comes to saint making. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is remembered more as the holy virgin who said ‘yes’ to God than the radical revolutionary who sung of God’s power to deny the rich and exalt the poor. By declaring Dorothy Day a “Servant of God” the Catholic Church has started her on the road to sainthood. I wonder if this is because it is uncomfortable with her.</p> <p>We might gently sneer at the idea of the Church declaring someone to be a saint - after all saints are a bit like left luggage in our Reformed tradition with some churches dedicated to them and the occasional observance of All Saints Day - if it happens to fall on a Sunday. We’re as good as the Catholic Church, though, at trying to control what makes us uncomfortable. How many times have we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• heard sermons on our passage from James?</li> <li>• realised that the Church isn’t good at organising to help the poor and the dispossessed?</li> <li>• understood that we don’t challenge the government enough - despite regularly reciting the powerful assertion in our <i>Statement of the Nature</i></li> </ul> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p><i>Faith and Order</i> that civil authorities are called to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind.</p> <p>There again Dorothy Day is a funny old saint (to be). A strong socialist yet obedient daughter of the Church. A youthful libertine yet impatient of the sexual revolution of the 1960s. A challenger of cardinals in labour disputes yet dogged insister of correct vesture for priests who celebrated mass on Catholic Worker farms. She's a contradiction, a holy woman who makes us uncomfortable - just as James makes us uncomfortable too.</p> |
|    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you make of that reading from James?</li> <li>• Is Dorothy Day a saint who appeals to you or who repels you?</li> <li>• What do you think the Biblical message about the rich and the poor is?</li> </ul>  |
|  | <p>What we do is very little.<br/>But it is like the little boy with a few loaves and fishes. Christ took that little and increased it. He will do the rest.</p> <p>What we do is so little<br/>we may seem to be constantly failing.<br/>But so did He fail.<br/>He met with apparent failure on the Cross.<br/>But unless the seed fall into the earth and die,<br/>there is no harvest.</p> <p>And why must we see results? Our work is to sow.<br/>Another generation will be reaping the harvest.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Dorothy Day</i></p>                     |

Session 4 Legendary Exploits  
Bridget | Elizabeth the Wonder Worker | Hildegard

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>St Brigid of Kildare</p> <p><i>The Rev'd Dr John McNeil Scott is Principal of the Scottish College<br/>and a member of Shawlands URC</i></p>  |   |
|  <p><i>St Brigid's Cross from <a href="https://allevents.in/glasgow/st-brigid-cross-workshop/10000516518078477">https://allevents.in/glasgow/st-brigid-cross-workshop/10000516518078477</a></i></p> |   |
|    | <p>Irish folklore abounds with stories of St Brigid of Kildare, born around 455 CE, the daughter of a powerful chieftain Dubhtach and a Christian slave girl. The young Brigid was wearingly generous...with the property of her father! She gave away his cattle, his supply of freshly churned butter - and on one occasion even his sword - to those whose need seemed greater. To thwart plans to marry her to a poet of high standing she disfigured herself so that she would be rejected and therefore able to follow her vocation to found an abbey seeking a grant of land from the King of Leinster around the year 480. The king, it is said, initially refused, but when she said she needed only as much land as her cloak would cover he laughingly relented. Unfortunately for the king, Brigid's cloak - when laid on the fertile earth of the Curragh - would miraculously grow to cover it all. The</p> |



We join with Isaac Watts as he pondered the land of pure delight where the saints dwell with God.

**Hymn** *There is a Land of Pure Delight*

Isaac Watts RS 668 – this works rather well to the tune Antioch – Joy to the World. The words are now public domain and no licence is needed to reproduce them.

There is a land of pure delight,  
where saints immortal reign;  
infinite day excludes the night,  
and pleasures banish pain.

4 But timorous mortals start & shrink  
to cross the narrow sea,  
and linger shivering on the brink,  
and fear to launch away.

2 There everlasting spring abides,  
and never-withering flowers;  
death, like a narrow sea, divides  
that heavenly land from ours.

5 O could we make our doubts remove  
those gloomy doubts that rise,  
and see the Canaan that we love  
with unobscured eyes;

3 Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood  
stand dressed in living green;  
so to the Jews old Canaan stood,  
while Jordan rolled between.

6 Could we but climb  
where Moses stood,  
and view the landscape o'er,  
not Jordan's stream,  
nor death's cold flood,  
should fright us from the shore!

We turn back to South America now and look at the ministry of a radical bishop.

**Dom Helder Câmara**

**February 1909 - August 1999**

*The Rev'd Andy Braunston is the URC's Minister for Digital Worship and a member of the Peedie Kirk URC in Kirkwall, Orkney.*



*Peters, Hans / Anefo © Dutch National Archives*



Helder Camara was born in the poor North East region of Brazil of an accountant father and primary school teaching mother. He entered the seminary in 1923 and was ordained in 1931 with a papal dispensation as he was below the normal ordination minimum age of 24. As a young priest he supported a far right political organisation similar to European fascist movements. However, he soon renounced these views, founding two Catholic worker movements to improve the lot of the poor.

In 1952 he was ordained as an auxiliary bishop of Rio de Janeiro, in that role, helped found a bank which would give low interest loans to the poor. He attended all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council where he helped draft one of the major documents, *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope) which clarified and reoriented the role of the church's mission to people outside of the Catholic Church. It was the first time that the church took explicit responsibility for its role in the larger world. In March 1964, Pope Paul VI appointed him Archbishop of Olinda e Recife.

Towards the end of Vatican II Câmara organised 40 bishops to meet at night in the Catacombs of Domitilla outside Rome. They celebrated mass and signed a document under the title of the "Pact of the Catacombs". In 13 points, they challenged their brother bishops to live lives of evangelical poverty: without honorific titles, privileges, and worldly ostentation. They taught that "the collegiality of the bishops finds its supreme evangelical realisation in jointly serving the two-thirds of humanity who live in physical, cultural, and moral misery". They called for openness "to all, no matter what their beliefs". Eventually 500 bishops signed this document but Paul VI, in the middle of the cold war, ignored it not wishing to give cause to Marxist countries by criticising Capitalism. The Pact is now best seen in the ministry of Pope Francis.

Câmara spoke out against the military dictatorship in Brazil, championed the rights of the poor and upset the ruling classes by advocating land reform. He is reputed to have said: "When I give food to the poor they call me a saint, when I ask why the poor have no food they call

Cuthbert ministered by God's grace as and when the Holy Spirit both inspired and equipped.



- Where do you think the URC's comfort zones are? How might we move beyond them like St Cuthbert did?
- It's interesting, for modern Christians, to see that St Cuthbert set up a bird sanctuary! What does our faith tell us about ecology and responsibility to other living creatures on earth?
- Cuthbert seemed to like his solitude – maybe he was something of an introvert – where do you find energy? Do you need time alone or with a small group of people or do you get energy from being with more people?



Gracious God,  
 who reaches out to each of us  
 through your love in Christ,  
 Help us in our turn to reach out to others  
 in Christ's name, especially on the margins.  
 Give us Cuthbert's courage and faith,  
 free us from the familiar  
 to step into challenging new spaces  
 and to be less risk averse.  
 During our earthly pilgrimage  
 may we consider the less trodden path  
 at each junction and choice,  
 and should that take us closer  
 to the margins of the familiar  
 reassure us you are already there before us. Amen.



When I visited Penrhys in 1989 the Revd Dr John Morgans said to me, “If you want to get to the heart of the Gospel, go to the edges.”

Cuthbert was an edgy saint – who understood this too in his day – and gravitated toward the edges. He would often disappear on his own into the Cheviot hills which in his day were lawless, disease ridden, and full of crime. Most people from outside those communities would avoid going into the region for fear of their lives, health, and wealth. However, we read in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* of how Cuthbert reached out to the small communities of the marginalised, stigmatised and feared hill people in God’s love: teaching, preaching, and healing; boldly going where no-one outside these closed communities would dare to venture.

If ever you walk St Cuthbert’s Way from Melrose to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, you will walk along a stretch which I always find profoundly moving: between Hethpool and Wooler you will walk through the archaeological remains of ancient structures mostly turfed over but still discernible, you will see the wild goats which still roam the hills as they did in Cuthbert’s day, and you will feel in that particularly striking landscape, peppered with hollows and hideaways, easily defended and from which the approaches are visible, you are truly walking in the steps of Cuthbert as he carried his portable altar and ministered to the hill folk, risking all in obedience to God’s call. 1400 years ago this was edgy terrain populated by communities which were a law to themselves – shunned by most on the softer coastal plains to the east and the gentle rolling landscape to the west. Out of his comfort zone,

me a Communist.” Cãmara associated himself with Liberation Theology - a movement seeking to analyse the Gospel and Society using the insights of Karl Marx whilst not supporting all his conclusions. On social issues Cãmara supported the right of abandoned spouses to remarry - the position of the Orthodox Churches - and he supported the right of married couples to use birth control.

In 1971 Cãmara published “The Spiral of Violence” which is distinctive for linking structural injustice with escalating rebellion and repressive reaction - all, for Cãmara, forms of violence. Cãmara called on the youth of the world to take steps to break the spiral, saying their elders became addicted to those escalating steps.

On Cãmara’s retirement John Paul II replaced him with a rather more conservative archbishop, but Cãmara continued to write and speak out for the poor. He died in 1999 and the first stage of his recognition as a saint took place in 2015 when he was declared a Servant of God.



**St Matthew 18: 1 - 4**

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.



When I came to faith Dom Hélder Câmara was one of my heroes. A saintly pastor, concerned with the poor, radical in political and social views, I puzzled at how on earth he'd become a bishop in the first place! (One suspects John Paul II shared that sense of wonder.)

The idea of a senior leader in the Church eschewing titles and status in order to work and identify with the "two thirds of humanity" who are poor is both so radical and Gospel-focused that it surprises us. We know all too well how easy it is to compromise - and I write this all too aware of my own privilege.

In the URC we can get quite smug about not having political or social power; unlike the Brazilian government in Câmara's time, our rulers give not a hoot about what we may say on the issues of the day. Our senior leaders aren't expected to grace the grand occasions of state nor give spiritual cover to the government (we have Established churches for that) and so we like to think we're on the edge.

Do we, I wonder, use our edginess to any good effect? Does our being on the edge of the social and religious life of these islands give us a perspective to see things as they really are or do we moan about our decline and lack of status? Do we seek out those who are poor, excluded, and oppressed and open our churches to them or just leave that work to Church Related Community Workers? Do we want to be a church which is open to all, child-like in its approach and welcome, or do we, deep down, hanker after the trappings of power and status?



lived after a full ministry on the mainland, and where he lived as a hermit until his eventual death. As a hermit, he had wrestled with his own spiritual demons, and sought escape from the murmurings and politics of daily church life.

**St Matthew 25: 31 - 40**

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, '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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'



St Cuthbert (634-687)

The Rev'd Dave Herbert is Moderator of the Northern Synod



photo credit British Museum, Creative Commons Licence



Cuthbert grew up in what is now North Northumberland/the Scottish Borders, entering the monastic life at Old Melrose under the tuition of St Boisil. Cuthbert moved on from Melrose to Lindisfarne upon the death of Aidan. Monk, a most reluctant bishop, and hermit, Cuthbert blazed a trail in many respects – for example setting up the world’s first recorded bird sanctuary on Inner Farne, just off the coast of Seahouses today. Cuthbert had, like Aidan, and many others in the Celtic church, a close affinity with God’s created world around him. Inner Farne was where Cuthbert eventually

Born in a poor region of Brazil Câmara knew his faith, and his ministry, had to make a difference. What difference does our, and your, ministry make to those around us?



- Câmara saw the violence of the revolutionary as a response to the violence of the state – and saw that keeping people poor and downtrodden is a form of violence. He felt the Church should condemn all forms of violence but understand why violence was used. What do you think? Are riots, for example, a response to other forms of violence?
- What do you make of this radical idea that church leaders shouldn’t live and dress simply and identify with the poor? We see it in the ministry of Pope Francis – for example still staying in the Vatican guest house rather than moving into the papal apartment. We see it, a bit, in the URC with our Moderators simply being ministers deployed to a particular role not a whole new order of ministry. What’s good and bad about this ministerial simplicity?
- What difference does our, and your, ministry make to those around us?



Come Lord!  
Do not smile and say you are already with us.  
Millions do not know you and to us who do, what is the difference?  
What is the point of your presence if our lives do not alter?  
Change our lives, shatter our complacency.

Make your word flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood  
and our life's purpose.  
Take away the quietness of a clear conscience.  
Press us uncomfortably so that your peace is made.  
Amen

*Dom Hélder Câmara*



We finish our reflections this week with the hymn For All The Saints Who Showed Your Love by John Bell and Graham Maule. © 1996, The Iona Community, GIA Publications, Inc. One Licence A-734713 All rights reserved. Tune O Waly Waly (StF 746)

For all the saints  
who showed your love  
in how they lived  
and where they moved,  
for mindful women, caring men,  
accept our gratitude again.

2 For all the saints  
who loved your name,  
whose faith increased  
the Saviour's fame,  
who sang your songs  
and shared your word,  
accept our gratitude, good Lord.

3 For all the saints  
who named your will  
and saw your kingdom  
coming still  
through selfless protest,  
prayer and praise,  
accept the gratitude we raise.

4 Bless all whose will  
or name or love  
reflects the grace  
of heaven above.  
Though unacclaimed  
by earthly powers,  
your life through theirs  
has hallowed ours.

isles. As we engage with our own stories in the light of his, can we find in them, and it, the promise of fruitfulness and hopefulness that causes us to go on.



- John seems to like the naughty Colmcille rather than the saintly Columba (even though they are the same person! Why might our shadow sides be rather more interesting?
- Colmcille's journey to Iona/missionary was made necessary as he had fallen out with powerful folk due to his own silliness. Have you ended up having rather important choices thrust upon you rather than being freely chosen? How did it work out?
- John makes this point about there being two Colmcilles/Columbas but I wonder if that's true of all the saints – an official version to inspire the faithful and an actual version which might be rather different. A public/private persona which may or may not be integrated. What do you think? Is this something about sainthood or something about how we are as humans?



Alone with none but thee, my God,  
I journey on my way;  
What need I fear when thou art near,  
Oh king of night and day?  
More safe am I within thy hand  
Than if a host did round me stand.

*Attributed to Saint Colmcille*

before the eyes of all the nations;  
and all the ends of the earth  
shall see the salvation of our God.

Bad boy plagiarist, fierce defender and diplomat, a hot-tempered keeper of rash promises. A man who recreated himself in a new place and in so doing became its apostle.

A missionary God-follower, as much impelled to go by problems in his past as called by sense of vocation. A serious person who kept his strange promise, and yet found ways around it, so they say.

Someone with two names and histories - importantly different in the place from which he came and the one to which he went. Two lives abutting and overlapping in a single life, with one integrity and multiple reputations. Two names at least, representing multiple rememberings.

It strikes me that Colmcille – in all his complexity and ethical compromise is so much more interesting and rewarding as a saint – than the more accomplished Columba, even though they are one and the same person.

Those of us who have left our home places willingly or unwillingly, may find humour and pathos in his story. Those of us whose lives seem to fall in sections, more allotted than chosen, likewise find resonance in the pattern of his legend. And also in his Columban discovery that exile to the edge of wildness would become a new centre, a new field of promise. I think of Colmcille/Columba as the Abraham of our north Atlantic



## Session 3 - Missionaries Aiden | Colmcille | Cuthbert

This week we look at three saints from the earlier ages of the Church – all on the edge, all who are valued still despite, or maybe because, details of their lives being rather sketchy.

### St Aiden (590-651)

*The Rev'd Dave Herbert is Moderator of the Northern Synod*




*photo from the Diocese of Westminster Youth Ministry*




St Aidan was an Irish monk, and a member of the monastic community on Iona. When the community first sent Cormán from their monastery to evangelise Northumbria at King Oswald's request, the mission failed. Cormán returned testily blaming the hard-heartedness and obstinacy of the Northumbrians. In their meeting Aidan suggested that maybe the mission had failed because the evangelist had not built up a positive relationship, and that a softer and more gentle,

companionable approach might work better. As Aidan shared his insight, Bede tells of how all eyes turned to Aidan, and they all realised he had talked himself into being the next monk to honour the King's invitation to go and share the love of God in Christ in Northumbria.

**James 2: 14 - 17**



What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.




Aidan's predecessor, obedient and faithful though he was, had proved to be a square peg in a round hole. An Aidan-shaped space needed to be filled, and together in council on Iona the right discernment flowed, and Aidan became a much-loved presence and effective evangelist working from the monastic community on Lindisfarne. Unlike his predecessor, Aidan had the confidence to let the Gospel settle into the relationships and lives he shared with those around him, rather than imposing formulaic conformity.

He was a non-conformist himself and would not be moulded by any socio-economic force that would compromise his calling. For example, Aidan taught, travelled, and visited on foot, not on the King's gift of a magnificent horse with all its expensive royal tack, which Aidan gave away to a beggar, much to the King's consternation. Aidan lived according to the truth that

Colmcille denounced this action, stoking up anger against the king, and soon after there was a fierce battle between the O'Neills and King Diarmuid in Cairbre Drom Cliabh, or Drumcliff, in County Sligo, where King Diarmuid's army was massacred with the loss of only a single O'Neill. A synod was convened to discipline Colmcille but they reached no conclusion after Brendan of Birr spoke up in his support. The saint, realising that trouble was destined to follow him wherever he went and whatever he did in his native place resolved to choose exile, promising that he would never again see Ireland, nor his feet touch its earth. This began Colmcille / Columba's missionary career and his ministry from the base he would ultimately build at Iona.

Of course, Colmcille did return to Ireland on at least one occasion, being sought by wise reputation to settle disputes. But it is said that on his visits home he travelled blindfolded and with sods of Iona earth strapped to his feet so that the vow he had promised would be fulfilled.

**Isaiah 52:7-10**



How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
who brings good news, who announces salvation,  
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'  
Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,  
together they sing for joy;  
for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion.  
Break forth together into singing,  
you ruins of Jerusalem;  
for the Lord has comforted his people,  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.  
The Lord has bared his holy arm

The meritorious Scottish life of Columba recounts wise leadership, humility, piety, diplomacy and missionary success. I wonder if perhaps we are inclined to project onto him the character, temperament and impulses of a later (Nineteenth Century) missionary age.

St Colmcille, in his earlier life and ongoing connections with his native place, is altogether more turbulent. A precocious teenager and accomplished musician, Colmcille became a monk and was ordained under St Mobhi at the renowned monastery of Glasnevin.

It was not long until he began to found other monasteries around the country, and by the time he was 25, it was said that he had founded 27 communities throughout Ireland.

Colmcille had a love of books that caused him trouble, as a book called the Psalter of the O'Donnells, or the Battle Book of the O'Donnells, caught his eye. This was a beautiful book the O'Donnell clan would bring with them whenever they marched off to battle.

He went back to his old teacher's Abbey in Movilla around 560CE, and began to secretly transcribe the Psalter while he stayed there. His host, the Abbot Finnian heard a copy was being made and decided to wait until it was finished, then told Colmcille that he couldn't depart with it, but must hand it over! Colmcille refused, but the Abbot appealed to King Diarmuid. Shortly after, Colmcille gave refuge to a young man who had accidentally killed one of his rivals in a game of hurling, but King Diarmuid dragged the youth from Colmcille's arms, and killed him on the spot!

God's economy is not the same as that of this world. He understood how God's mission would not be facilitated by himself hanging on to the seductive trappings of royal patronage: he was called to reach the people God had led him to be among. It was an edgy and reckless act in view of his powerful patron, but Aidan was sure-footed in his repost to the King's displeasure when he challenged him, "What are you saying, your majesty? Is this child of a mare more valuable to you than this child of God?" (Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*).

Speaking truth to power, refusing to be conformed to worldly values, engaged daily in close quarter missional activity rather than arms-length management from the King's fortress at Bamburgh, Aidan's edgy ministry of presence was incarnational and authentic, and won over the hearts of many with both his authenticity and a missional heart, keen to share God's love in Christ through everyday acts of compassion, understanding, and love.



- Like the radicals we looked at in the last session Aidan saw riches as a hindrance to ministry. Can we be the Church without riches and resources?
- Aidan was something of a maverick but was embedded in his monastic community. Maybe the spiritual sustenance of his fellow monastics helped give him the energy and pattern of life to undertake his ministry. How does the church community you are part of help or hinder your own ministries?
- Aidan was probably not on the top of the king's favourite people! Powerful folk don't often like it

when they are told the truth. How easy do you find it to tell the truth to those who have power?



God before us, alongside us, and ahead of us,  
Keep us true to your call.  
Forgive our easy compromises.  
By your grace and the discernment of sisters and brothers around us,  
Help us to find the right-shaped space for us in which we can effectively, authentically, & naturally, share the good news of your love in the world.  
By your Holy Spirit, like Aidan,  
keep us compassionate, understanding, patient and generous.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.

We look now at Columba/Colmcille. An Irish monk exiled to Scotland. A saint and a sinner, a man with two names.

## St Colmcille

*The Rev'd Dr John McNeil Scott is Principal of the Scottish College and a member of Shawlands URC in Glasgow.*



The saint in his cell, reconstruction  
Source: [https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/archiveofnews/2017/july/headline\\_536559\\_en.html](https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/archiveofnews/2017/july/headline_536559_en.html)



St Colmcille (in Irish meaning 'Dove of the Church') is a person of multiple names, many legends and – we might even say – different sanctities. Born in 521 in Gartan, County Donegal, to a wealthy family associated with the powerful O'Neills. Some say his given name at birth was "Crimthann", meaning a "fox". He is better known in Scotland, and beyond, as St Columba of Iona.