

PIONEERS OF VIBRANT HOPE

Lee Abbey Retreat 10-14 May 2021

Day 1: Fillan: Seeing in the Dark

Habakkuk 3.16-19

- ¹⁶ I hear, and I tremble within;
my lips quiver at the sound.
Rottenness enters into my bones,
and my steps tremble beneath me.
I wait quietly for the day of calamity
to come upon the people who attack us.
- ¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
- ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.
- ¹⁹ God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
and makes me tread upon the heights.

Questions for Reflection:

1. As you reflect on these past months of the pandemic, what have been the main darkneses with which you have had to contend?
2. What questions have you been asking of God?
3. What has given you hope in these days?
4. You may like to look through the short book of Habakkuk. What is God saying to you today through these words of the prophet?
5. Is there somewhere you can go today that can become for you a healing pool? For example, somewhere quiet in your home or garden, or a walk somewhere. Pray for the healing of Christ on your mind in this place.

Prayer

When mystery hides Thee from the sight of faith and hope: when pain turns even love to dust: when life is bitter to the taste and our song of joy dies down to silence, then, Father, do for us that which is past our power to do for ourselves. Break through our darkness with Thy light. Show us Thyself in Jesus suffering on a Tree, rising from a grave, reigning from a throne, all with power and love for us unchanging. So shall our fear be gone and our feet set upon a radiant path.
(From *Hebridean Altars* by Alistair Maclean)

Day 1: Fillan: Seeing in the Dark (continued)

FILLAN

Fillan lived in the early 8thc and became a hermit dwelling in a cave in Pittenweem in Fife. He then became an abbot of a nearby monastery, but left there to move to Perthshire and is buried at Strathfillan. Near here is a pool that is associated with Fillan's healing ministry. It is a place that became particularly noted for the cure of those with mental illness, suggesting this was a ministry of Fillan.

Curled in the corner of his dark, dark cave
Fillan sleeps a restless sleep
and dreams a dark night dream.
He pulls the goatskin coat over his sturdy shoulder.
A ray of moonshine strokes his furrowed forehead.
His breath rises as mist from his murmuring lips.

But in his dream
Fillan now journeys to his sparkling sunlit river,
to his sacred pool of healing.
He sees his troubled soul washed in the lucid waters
by the gentle hands of Christ
and his mind is once again made whole,
for these are waters that are graced with
peace for wounded minds.

Gracious Father,
when my mind is troubled and entangled
by the darkness of this broken world
lead me to your hallowed pools of healing
and immerse me in your peace,
and make me a messenger of this sacred stream
to the troubled souls I meet along my path.

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Day 2: Boisil - Facing Death

John 19.38-42

38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Questions for Reflection:

1. If the subject of death and dying is too tender for you at the moment, then I advise you don't make use of these reflective questions. Rather you may want to use the time to be open to the healing presence of God's Holy Spirit to provide the healing and strength you need at this time.
2. How do you feel about your own death? Is there anything you need to do to make it easier for you or others when that day comes.
3. What do you believe about life after death?
4. Even though we do have the assurance of the risen Christ, many Christians do still feel afraid of death. If you do feel anxious or afraid, what do you need to help you to feel less anxious?
5. Turn to one of the resurrection stories in the gospels and spend time with it. Imagine yourself as being there at the time. How would it have felt to have seen Jesus risen from the tomb? What questions might you want to ask him? What do you think he might say to you today?

Prayer

My Father in heaven:

I give thanks that you have called me to this life here on Earth.

I am alive this day because your breath is in me.

The day will come when you will call me Home.

Take from me my fears and open me anew to your love

That when my turn comes

I may journey from this life strong in spirit

And sure in hope

Amen.

Day 2: Boísil - Facing Death (continued)

BOISIL

Boisil was the abbot of the monastery at Melrose. He was much admired for his learning, holiness and prophetic gifts. He tutored Cuthbert who joined his community in 651. Both he and Cuthbert engaged in preaching journeys in the region. He died from the plague in 661.

Boisil leans on his downy pillow
His bones feel frail
His breathing shallow
The flame of his mortal life is flickering.
Beside him his young friend
runs his finger over the manuscript
and reads the words of life.

For one last time Boisil hears the story
of the One he has served with such devotion.
He hears of the scars, the cries and the cruel nails.
He hears of the gentle friends closing the tomb.
He hears of the women and the angels
and the glorious sunrise.

He is leaving this world he has loved so much
But his soul now reaches out in wonder
as he hears the music for which he has longed all his days.
He is alive! He is alive!
Cuthbert closes the book
and closes the eyes of the one who has departed
And has arrived.

Lord, grant me a Boisil faith
to live well the life you have granted me on Earth
and root in me such words of life
that hope will grow so strong
that I may face my own passing
with confidence and peace.

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Day 3: Non - Birthing New Life

Acts 8.26-39

26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) 27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' 30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' 31 He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.'

34 The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' 38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

Questions for reflection

1. As you reflect on this past year, what words come to mind to describe how you have felt during the days of the pandemic and the lockdowns?
2. You may find it helpful to write down these words and offer them to God. What words do you think he offers you in return?
3. What might God be saying to you today from Non's story?
4. If you are feeling yourself to be in a wilderness place, think about Philip's story. Where might there be good news in this wilderness?
5. Isaiah 40 is a message to people who were in the very painful place of exile. Spend some time with this chapter which is proclaiming that there is a message in the wilderness. Draw these words into your soul and let them work hope in you today.

Prayer

Spirit of Christ

When I find myself in wilderness places

Open my ears to the voice of the prophets

And open my eyes to behold your wonders

I welcome hope to rise in my soul this day

And let my life bring hope to others.

Amen

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Day 3: Non - Birthing New Life (continued)

NON

Non gave birth to David around 500 during a great storm. Tradition has it that when she gave birth, nearby water gushed from the ground and became a natural spring of water that has flowed ever since. It has been regarded as one of the most sacred wells of Wales, and many healings have taken place here.

We see you, Non,
In paintings, windows and sculptures
As a serene mother
Holding your infant, David, to your side.

But on that day when your waters broke
You gripped the stone on which you lay
And in your agony you birthed that young saint
Into Welsh destiny.
With his birth
The waters of the earth broke
Upon the bright sea-breezed headland
And have never ceased to flow.
To this crystal stream
Countless followers have pilgrimmed
To mark their new birth
And to feel the cool waters that rise from the dark earth.

Oh God,
Let your fountains of living water
Spring up again upon our dry land.
Flood us with the waters of new life
Flowing from the deep earth
Of your most generous heart.

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Day 4: Brigid - Lighting Fires

Luke 2.36-38

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Reflection

Today we have considered the stories of two women. You may like to reflect on one or both of their stories in the following way:

Brigid

1. What questions would you ask Brigid about her life, her ministry, her vision, her community?
2. Why do you think she, and generations after her, felt it important to keep a flame alight in the community?
3. You can do your own research on Brigid and find lots of stories and legends about her, including one which claims she time-travelled to be the midwife to Mary when she gave birth to Jesus. You may like to look up a painting by the Scottish artist, John Duncan, where he depicts two angels carrying Brigid (also known as Bride) to Bethlehem. Try to get a close up of the picture and notice scenes from the gospels on the angel's robes.

Go to: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/17484/saint-bride>

Anna

1. What questions would you ask Anna about her experience in the Temple? How do you think she might answer you?
2. How does Anna give you hope today?

Prayer

Father of lights

Thank you for those you have sent to this world
who have carried the light of Christ so faithfully.

I remember Anna and Brigid,
and friends who have been light-bearers to me.

As the sun rises high in the sky today

Let hope rise in my heart.

Warm my soul

so that I can shine Christ-light to others.

Amen

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Day 4: Brigid - Lighting Fires (continued)

Brigid

Brigid was born around 454. She was the Abbess of the monastery at Kildare that included both women and men. She was known for her kindness and charity, assisting the poor and freeing slaves. The fire she lit in the heart of her community burned for a thousand years, and the remains of this fire temple exist to this day.

Leading lady, leading light and brightly lit leader;
You were fuelled by the Breath of God
And the deep breath of a people inhaling the life of Christ.
Lit by compassion you reached out with healing.
Your flame burned for a thousand years
Tended by women of faith
And your fire is still remembered
By those who seek the warmth of Christ.

Dear God, open the vents of heaven
That I may catch my breath at your wonders
Fill me, that I may breathe upon the dimly burning wicks
And the fragile fires burning in the hearts
Of your servants in this beloved yet wounded world
And let the compassion of Brigid
Be as a fire in the temple of my soul.

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Day 5: Kevin - Embracing the Quiet

Reflection and Prayer

For your reflection and prayer today, read very slowly these two Psalms. Take a verse at a time and dwell with it. What words does the Spirit of God highlight for you? What does *Waiting for God* mean for you today? Spend time waiting... Like a weaned child, spend time in the company of your divine Parent - not demanding anything, but simply enjoying the company of the one who loves you. You may like to end the time by writing your own Prayer of the Quiet.

Psalm 130

- ¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
- ² Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!
- ³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
- ⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.
- ⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
- ⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.
- ⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
- ⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Psalm 131

- ¹ O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvellous for me.
- ² But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
- ³ O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time on and for evermore.

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Day 5: Kevin - Embracing the Quiet (continued)

Prayer

Give us the mind of Jesus, something of His brave heart, as we sail over the waters of experience.
And days of sunshine.

And favouring winds.

And stars to be our guide when the sun is set.

Yet this is but half our asking.

Lord of pity, when trouble rises, as a storm, turning our trust to fear,
bring us into the quiet place of Thy presence
and be our haven.

(From *Hebridean Altars* by Alistair Maclean)

KEVIN

Kevin was born in the middle of the 6th century. He founded his monastery in the lower valley of Glendalough, but later felt called to live the life of a hermit in the upper valley. He was at heart a mystic and was a great poet. He was a gentle and kind person with an unusual affinity to nature.

Gentle Kevin

Few heard your footsteps in the forest

As you searched for your place of prayer.

You came to your mountain like an evening mist;

Mystery hung in the valley

While poetry rose in your soul.

Young mystic, dark-battling, light-releasing saint

You settled in your quiet soil

As autumn leaves brushed the lips

That quivered in devotion.

Sweet Jesus

May I too find my high places of prayer;

Give me the grace to live with the shadows of God

And let holy mists of glory

Rise in praise to my most dear Creator.

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