

Follow us during Lent.

Scan this QR code to go to our dedicated 'Lent' page on the New Creation website for full details of lent groups and other downloadable resources.

If you don't have access to the internet, why not follow along with one of our recommended books from the Lent leaflet sent out last week, or follow along with a copy of #LiveLent. If you would like a copy, but have not received one, either get in touch or there are some booklets available in either St. Andrew's, Banwell or Congresbury.



What is happening "Worship wise"- "CHURCH IS ONLINE during this month:"

Back at the beginning of this current Lockdown, when it was decided to move to Church Online only for the time being, we agreed as a Senior Team, made of Wardens and others from both Churches, to review the situation at the end of each month. At the meeting of the Senior Team on Thursday evening the majority decision was that we should continue with "Church Online" only for this coming month and that this would include Holy Week and Easter (April 4th). We would look at the situation again at the end of March with a view as to what should happen during April and thereafter.

We will, of course, try and enable physical worship as well as soon as possible. In the meantime, both churches are open each day for private prayer.

We will also be looking at trying to provide physical resources at home in order to enable the individual celebration of Easter and I hope we can share these with you as soon as possible.



TOYBOX

For many years St Andrew's, Congresbury has supported children through the charity Toybox, a charity committed to ending the global injustice of children living and working on city streets.

We ask members who wish to contribute, to donate £1 per month, paid to the Church account annually (£12).

This, of course, is not just open to St. Andrew's, Congresbury. Anyone from Banwell who wishes to donate is very welcome and shows a sense of unity between the two churches and New Creation as a whole.

This is a very worthy cause and any contribution would be gratefully received.

Cash or cheques (please mark them as being for Toybox) can be given to your Church @ Home coordinator to be passed on to Beth Ashton-Hilton, Treasurer, or dropped through the letterbox at 14 Weetwood Road, Congresbury BS49 5BN. Cheques made payable to **St. Andrew's Congresbury PCC**

Electronic Bank Transfer: Bank: **NatWest** Sort Code: **60-23-32** Account No: **72280484** using the reference "Toybox".



Our Zambia Link

A couple of weeks ago, Reader Jenny Humphreys shared news of our brothers and sisters in our link parish of Chililabombwe in Zambia. The Covid pandemic has hit hard in Zambia in this second wave and the vaccines are not looking to be as widely available there for some time, so we ask you all to keep our link parish and the people of Zambia and other African countries in your prayers as their healthcare systems are spread thin.

SUNDAY 28TH FEBRUARY, 2021 SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Thought for the Week: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34)



These well known words of Jesus have been handed down from generation to generation over the centuries often talking about how being a Christian or living by a Christian faith can sometimes be a 'costly' business and not just about "happy" times.

They form part of one of the more challenging speeches that Jesus gave, and which is recorded in all four gospels, and is the subject of the Bible reading in the Livestream service this weekend.

So, what was Jesus driving at when He first spoke these words? Was He asking us literally, "to give up everything" in order to follow Him: did He mean houses, livelihoods, money, wealth, status, family? And did He literally mean "we had to likewise take a physical cross, presumably to be willing to die for our faith?"

Not, at first sight, a very attractive 'sales pitch,' or indeed, 'lifestyle' choice.

Of course, over the centuries there have been those who have literally felt called "to leave all they had" to follow a deeper call of Christ on their lives – monks and nuns from very earliest times (certainly from the 3rd Century onwards with the Desert Fathers and Mothers, but maybe also earlier) they left family, status, and many creature comforts in order to seek solitude a deeper personal relationship with the Creator and Redeemer of their soul.

And, sadly, and not just in the Christian faith, there are those who have been persecuted, and indeed, still are being persecuted for their faith: certain Christian communities in different parts of Pakistan, Karen Christians in Myanmar along with Rohingya Muslims, and Christian minorities in many countries throughout the rest of the Arabic and sub-Saharan world.

But how do these words of Jesus then have any bearing on us?

Are we meant to likewise be willing to give up "everything" – what about our homes, our lifestyles, the lives that so many of us have worked for all these years?

During this time of Lent some of us have begun looking again at some of this, but through the eyes of some of the great Celtic Saints (many of whose lives we looked at as part of the 'Daily Blog' last year). The life of one of these saints might offer us a helpful perspective.

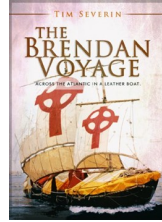
"St Brendan the Navigator," to quote his full title, was a contemporary of St Congar (late 5th/early 6th century). He came from the Tralee on the south west coast of Ireland and as a young man studied under St Finnian of Clonard, who also tutored and mentored St Columba of Iona.

Brendan became Abbot of his own community and, alongside this, undertook many various voyages both by sea and land from Scotland to Brittany, and some believe even to Spain, Portugal and even as far as the west coast of Africa.

But St Brendan is perhaps most famously known for his epic journey, together with fourteen monks, in search of what he called the “Promised Land of the Saints,” mirroring Moses and the Israelite people in the Old Testament in search of the “Promised Land” of Israel after their fleeing of the land of slavery and of Egypt (see the Book of Exodus), except that Brendan’s journey was 4,500 miles by sea and by boat rather than across the Sinai peninsula.



In 1975 Tim Severin, a historian and adventurer, sought to re-enact Brendan’s epic journey by first trying to rebuild an early Irish Currach of oak frame and covered in tanned leather (about 36ft long). Together with three friends, he followed Brendan’s description both of his boat and its voyage and found that the description fourteen hundred years earlier matched consistently – he journeyed to Staffa, off the coast of Iona, the Faroes Islands, Iceland, Greenland and then finally along the coast of Labrador (with its infamous fog bank) and eventually to Newfoundland, where he discovered a warm ‘local’ if not national welcome the Canadians and particularly amongst those who knew the sea best.



So, effectively, Brendan could well have been the first westerner to discover America, a full 900 years before Christopher Columbus. Certainly, Tim Severin believes that the number of consistencies in St Brendan’s account of his travels make it almost inconceivable that he didn’t actually fulfil and complete such an adventure.

So why did he do it? Was he a glory seeker? Was he simply trying to prove something and was so determined, say like the 21 year old young lady, Jasmine Harrison who recently became the youngest woman ever to have rowed single-handed across the Atlantic albeit a lot further south? So, was it was all about achievement?

The answer is maybe in part, at least, a bit. But only a small part. To anyone who has ever read any of his journal and travel log “Navigatio”, Brendan’s main purpose was simply to try and follow Christ’s call on his life and to be faithful no matter what the cost. The size of the challenge wasn’t the big thing, St Brendan, now an old man, went on to make further trips to England, Wales and Scotland, studying under St Gildas the Wise amongst others. No, the point was that he continued to want to ‘journey’ ever deeper into the life and heart of Christ: the physical miles were simply an expression and pointer to the spiritual ‘miles’ that he was willing to put in to leaving behind self and “falling ever deep in devotion and love to Christ.”

A ‘journey’ that was with him all his life.

In this context, Jesus’ words that “the only way to discover this deeper relationship with God is by letting go of self” makes absolute sense. In fact, I would go further and say, “I totally admire Jesus in His capacity as a spiritual ‘teacher’ and mentor in His directness and the bluntness of His honesty.

Letting go of self, and ‘embarking’ on developing a prayer life, whether through contemplation, the reading of Scripture, or through a deeper awareness of the sacramental in the world is a bit like setting out from a well-known and much loved ‘shore’ (one’s self) into an ocean, or ‘Desert’ as St Brendan calls it, where both the journey and how things will turn out are not fully known or certain, and can be fraught with many highs and lows along the way. Not to mention the constant nagging in the back of one’s mind, “why not turn back. Stop this silliness and danger. Why not do a metaphorical ‘turn around’ and go back to Egypt, even if it does mean a return to normality and even ‘slavery’ again to self pre-occupation?”

“Taking up one’s cross,” recognises both the sacrifice, the risk, and the determination of will needed to endure the approach such a life demands. No wonder calling upon the help of God, through His Holy Spirit, is key to St Brendan’s daily prayer. Getting out one’s prayer book or prayer diary, lighting one’s prayer candle, sitting there, especially in those times of stillness when you really don’t feel like it, is, in some small way, to stand in the footsteps of St Brendan, and many others and understand and enter into this strange world of spiritual as well as physical adventure.



“But I’m too old” I hear some say. Well, that’s as maybe. I just find it interesting that St Brendan is described as “one with silver hair” by the time he made his voyage. And, of course, Abraham was well on in years before he left Ur of the Chaldeans on his two thousand mile adventure simply as his “yes to God” four thousand years ago (see the Book of Genesis end of ch 11 and beginning of ch 12).

Sadly, because of all these uncertainties, potential pitfalls, and the need for certainty and security in our modern world, many people, both in Church and the wider community prefer the ‘safety’ and comfort of both ‘harbour’ and ‘land’ and so, unfortunately, ‘travel’ little in this life or only do so vicariously, through the stories and tales others.

But the difference between St Brendan and his epic physical voyage and the ‘journey’ of prayer, is that we can all undertake the later. From the most humble of beginnings, simply trusting and trying to find oneself in the words of the Lord’s Prayer for instance, rather than simply reciting it, enables the first tentative feet to be found away from the shore. And bit by bit, if we can stick at it, soon even the shoreline looks further and further in the distance and rather than looking back we begin to look forward to the adventure that is yet ahead of us, to being very small in the ‘ocean’ or ‘desert’ of God’s love.

Matt Thomson.

N.B. If you want to follow up on the adventures of St Brendan, a very good book on the spirituality of St Brendan and which captures the spiritual aspect to such a physical pilgrimage, was written by David Adam, one time warden of Lindisfarne Island and acclaimed author on Celtic spirituality – “A Desert in the Ocean” (Paperback from Amazon – I recently paid just £1.91 for a new copy as I’d given my own copy to someone.)

If you are interested in the re-enactment of the epic voyage itself by Tim Severin – there is a book and a DVD available, also from Amazon.

And there are YouTube clips of the Epic Voyage:

The Brendan Voyage Part 1: [\(1\) The Brendan Voyage 1 - YouTube](#)

The Brendan Voyage Part 2: [\(1\) The Brendan Voyage 2 - YouTube](#)

(both about 30 mins long – but please be aware filmed in 1978 when quality particularly of backing track sound is, “Interesting.” Otherwise, really interesting and really inspiring.)

