

St Cuthbert's Day
04-09-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Ezekiel 34: 11-16	The Lord will rescue his Sheep
Psalms 23	The Lord is my Shepherd
2 Corinthians 6: 1-10	Paul and his companions making the way to salvation known
Matthew 18: 12-14	The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Introduction

Today, we celebrate the day of the Patron Saint of our Parish, St Cuthbert.

Let us today hear a little of the life and example of St Cuthbert and of the bible readings that have been chosen as we are encouraged by his life of Faith.

St Cuthbert

St Cuthbert was a Monk, Missionary and Bishop from Northumbria, the eastern part of Britain around the border between England and Scotland. It is surmised he was born around the year 640. He excelled in sports and games as a child, and later became a shepherd. As a child Cuthbert had an experience that drew him close to God. In 651, when St Aidan (the then Bishop of Lindisfarne) died, it is said Cuthbert had a vision of Aidan's soul being transported to heaven. Cuthbert went from being a shepherd to being a monk in the monastery at Melrose, and from there he would go out to the surrounding villages and share the gospel. It has been said, "he mostly travelled to those places which lay out of the way among the mountains, which by their poverty and natural horrors deterred other visitors. Yet even here did his devoted mind find exercise for his powers of teaching, in as much that he often remained a week, sometimes a month, without returning home; but, dwelling among the mountains, taught the country people heavenly things, both by his words and example."

Cuthbert's reputation as a holy man grew, due to the love and humility he showed to the people around him. Like so many saints, he also had a great love of nature, and an attraction to wild animals.

He went on to be the Prior of the Monastery at Lindisfarne. Cuthbert's reputation for gifts of healing and insight drew many people to meet with him. He was so devoted to prayer, it was said he would sometimes not sleep, and spend entire nights in prayer.

After 12 years in 676, he obtained permission of the Abbot to retire for greater solitude to one of the Farne Islands, just south of Lindisfarne. He lived alone in devotion to God, but he would take visitors to consult with him about their soul's health. It is said he provided for himself by cultivating a barren patch of land, and kept the birds from eating the barley by preaching to them. Whilst on the Farne Islands, Cuthbert instituted special laws to protect the Eider ducks and other seabirds nesting on the islands. These may have been the first bird protection laws anywhere in the world.

In 685 he was unanimously elected Bishop of Lindisfarne, and reluctantly accepted, but only after being visited on his island, by the King and another Bishop. He took to the role of Bishop in earnest, returning to visiting and preaching all around the Diocese. He showed God's love to others by the example of his life. He continued to observe the strictness of his monastic life, and reached out to the poor and needy.

Cuthbert did not spend a long time as a Bishop though. Just after Christmas in 686, Cuthbert knew he was unwell, and returned to his cell on Farne Island. He died on the 20th March 687. Cuthbert was buried on Lindisfarne Island, though his earthly remains were later moved and interred at Durham Cathedral.

Missionary

Cuthbert is known not only as a Monk and a Bishop, but also as a Missionary. Missionaries are people who intentionally go out to share the "Good News" of Jesus with others.

But why is there this imperative within Christianity to share about Jesus?

I would like to explore this by asking the question, "When was the last time you heard some Good News?" Just recently Leeza and I became grandparents, and I wanted to share the news of the arrival of our grandson, George, with everyone. No one told me I had to, I was just so excited about it that I was happy to tell our parish family, friends, and other blokes at the gym, I hardly know.

As Christians, it should be like that for us, with Jesus. Jesus is the way to God. Jesus is the way to meaning, and understanding, and true fulfilment in life. Jesus is "Good News". Cuthbert experienced God's presence in his life, and so being a missionary came from within him.

It may have been hard work, but it was something Cuthbert was willing to do, because he knew he was carrying out God's will in his life. Being a missionary was something Cuthbert was called to do and something he wanted to do.

Sheep and Shepherd Imagery

Our Scripture readings set down for today, as we celebrate St Cuthbert's day, have imagery about sheep and shepherds, in talking about God's love for us. Cuthbert was a shepherd, so it seems logical that he would have had a great insight into the imagery in the Bible around sheep and shepherds, and how this imagery is used to try to give us an insight into God's love for us.

The first reading from the bible today is from the Prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel was taken into exile in Babylon with many of the other Jews. He served God as a prophet there. His message to the Jews in exile, was that they needed to repent. They had been sent into exile because of their disobedience to God, but God still loved them and if they repented, and returned to trusting God, they would be saved and restored to the land of Israel.

In Chapter 34 we hear imagery of shepherds and sheep. At the start of the chapter Ezekiel compared the leaders of Israel to bad shepherds who did not lead the sheep well. In verse 11 we hear Ezekiel prophesy:-

¹¹ For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.

It has been said that this prophecy refers to Jesus himself coming as the Good Shepherd. It refers to how God will rescue all his sheep who are lost, or have strayed, or are injured or weak.

How wonderful it is to know that God cares for us this much.

Today we also had the most well known of all the Psalms, Psalm 23. Again we hear of the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep. As long as God is our shepherd, we can be assured we remain in God's loving care.

And our gospel reading today is of the Lost Sheep. It reminds us that God is actively searching us out and wanting to be our Good Shepherd. The challenge for us is, do we allow God to be our Good Shepherd. God is actively searching you out to be a part of God's flock, but as the analogy goes for the sheep to be safe, they must follow the shepherd.

Conclusion

St Cuthbert began his life as a shepherd of sheep. He no doubt also saw himself as one of God's flock, as he earnestly sought to follow God in his own life. He went on to be a shepherd of people to help them to be a part of God's flock. As we acknowledge the example of St Cuthbert, let us examine our own lives and consider, how are we following Jesus as part of God's flock, and how are we helping others so that they too, might experience the wonderful love that God offers us, as the Good Shepherd. Amen.