

St Columba's Day 7th June 2026

Isaiah 61:1-3. Ephesians 4:12-19. Matthew 5: 13-16.

Good morning, it is lovely to have you with us today, and to come together as we 'Kirk the Whipman'.

Rather than the lectionary readings for the second Sunday in the season of Pentecost, I chose the readings assigned for St Columba's Day, which falls on 9th June, this coming Tuesday.

Thank you to Campbell and Anna for reading from Isaiah and Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Our reading from Isaiah chapter 61 is from the section from chapter 55 to the end of the book in chapter 66 that is considered by many academics to be the third prophet whose words were collected together. These twelve chapters were written after the return of the Jews from forced exile in Babylon – the exile took place between 597 and 538 BC. The prophet envisions the glorious fulfilment of God's purposes that will transform Jerusalem and all nations on their return from exile.

Jesus quoted from this passage, as reported by Luke, when he returned to his home town of Nazareth after spending forty days in the wilderness. It is often called the 'Nazarene Manifesto', setting out the vision Jesus had for his ministry and mission. That mission was:

- ✝ To preach good news to the poor
- ✝ To proclaim freedom for the prisoners
- ✝ Recovery of sight to the blind, and
- ✝ To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

We should think of prisoners as more than just those locked up in jail, but anyone who was a prisoner to self-limiting or damaging habits, habits and ways of living that inhibited them from living to their full potential.

We should think of the blind as more than those with limited or no actual eyesight, but also those who could not see, or did not want to see the possibilities and wondrous nature of God's kingdom come to earth.

Those four points make for a powerful manifesto, seeking to change how people lived, how they were governed, how they treated each other. It called for a complete change in how that society operated, and the values that underpinned all aspects of life. At the end of Jesus' life he left his disciples with a simple distillation of this teaching, what we call 'the new commandment', to love one another as Jesus had loved them.

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians speaks of the transforming power of choosing to follow the ways of Jesus; how faith in Christ, and the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit will lead people, even the Greeks from Ephesus, into speaking the truth in love, to become the mature body that in every respect is fashioned in the likeness of Christ. Paul, on more than one occasion uses the analogy of the human body to describe how we are all parts of the one body, performing different functions, but held together by ligaments of love. He compares this transformed way of being and living with the bad old ways of thinking and behaving. Today our analogy could be the Crescendo Choir; we need a conductor, a pianist, sopranos, altos, tenors and basses in order to make a fully formed choir that makes wonderful music, so much richer than what one person can accomplish.

Our gospel reading is from a small part of Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus told the crowd that they were the salt of the earth, and that they were the light of the world. We know that salt preserves, stopping decay. It also doesn't need too much to have an impact.

Today when we call someone 'the salt of the earth' we tend to be describing the values that we see lived out through their actions; trustworthy, honest, having integrity, caring, loving, humble, and doing good. Jesus paired this with being the light in the world, because he expected his listeners, whilst acting like the salt of the earth, to follow his example, to be visible, to shine the light of all truth into dark places in the world. To do as he had taught and shown them, in order to bring glimpses of God's kingdom to earth. If sufficient people did this, it would transform the world and usher in a new age.

So, you may ask, why were these readings chosen to be read on St Columba's Day? Hopefully you know something of Columba? Born in 521 into the O'Neil family of Irish nobility in Donegal, Colum as he was called, became a monk and gifted priest, and went on to found religious communities in Derry, Durrow and Kells. In 561 there arose a dispute about a book of St Finian's that Colum copied, and a resultant bloody battle led to Colum choosing to self-exile. He and twelve companions sailed across to Argyll and was granted permission to settle on Iona by the local King – possibly a relation of the O'Neil's.

Columba was known as Columcille – 'Dove of the Church' – Columba is the Latin derivative of his Gaelic name that we now call him. From his monastery on Iona Columba travelled across the Pictish kingdoms and converted many of them to Christianity, spreading the good

news of the Gospel. It is even thought he met St Mungo in Kilmacolm during one of his many missionary journeys.

Columba's life story shows that even the most talented and holy people can make a wrong decision, and yet turn their life around and make a significant impact by using their talents for the glory of God, spreading the good news of Christ across what we now call Scotland. Columba certainly acted like salt of the earth and spread the light of Christianity effectively. Columba's life shows that our God is compassionate and forgiving God of love, available to all who seek forgiveness and earnestly wish to return to the path and follow the ways of Christ.

George McLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, used the example and life of Columba as an inspiration for forming a radical Christian community in the 1930's in Glasgow, and just like Columba, got permission of the owner of the Isle of Iona to build, or in his case, rebuild the Abbey accommodation adjoining the Abbey. Today, the Iona Community still operates the guest accommodation and runs church services three times a day in Iona Abbey. The Iona Community is no longer a purely Scottish based charity, it has members across the world. In recent years there has been a renewed interest in what is called 'new monasticism' and this has been reflected in the number of people who wish to join the Iona Community and vow to adhere to a rule of life.

1. Daily prayer, regular engagement with the Bible.
2. Working for justice and peace, wholeness and reconciliation in our localities, society and the whole of creation.
3. Supporting fellow members in prayer, meeting, communicating and being accountable to one another for the use of our gifts of

money and time and how we use the earth's resources, and how we keep the rule.

4. Sharing in the corporate life of the Iona Community.

My understanding of my faith is that it is firstly personal, in that my prayer life and my times of worship strengthen my relationship with Christ and open me up to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I also understand my faith to have an active and outward facing aspect to it, to do as Jesus commanded as and as we heard in our reading from Isaiah; to find my own way to follow Jesus' manifesto. I can't do it alone. I need my prayer life to guide me and I also get inspiration and support by being a member of the Iona Community. In that way I can find ways to do somethings to work for justice and peace, wholeness and reconciliation and the whole of creation.

Now, I accept that you don't have to be a self-confessing Christian to do good in this world. There are plenty of examples of selfless and sacrificial acts by people who profess to have no faith. There are also, sadly people who profess to have a Christian faith, who do not seem to have taken to heart the message of unconditional love for all others that Jesus walked, talked, breathed, and died for.

As Jesus said more than once, our fruit is what truly shows who we are – the visible acts and how we live our lives.

In a land through which Columba journeyed, preached and converted people to the Christian faith, we are all challenged, I believe, to seek ways to further Christ's work; to do as Isaiah and Jesus requires of us. Luckily we are all unique and are all loved by God. Every person whose eyes we look into is loved by God. And luckily, we will all have our own ways to seek to help fulfil Jesus' Nazarene manifesto.

How do you feel called in this place, at this time, to show God's unconditional love for all of God's creation? Isaiah, Jesus and St Columba all walked the talk. Over to you...