



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

May 10, 2009

Easter 5, 2009

On the west coast of Scotland is a very small island called Iona. It is thought that a Christian presence existed on Iona from the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century but it was only documented when a saint called Columba was exiled from Ireland because of his involvement in the battle of Cul Dreimnhe, and so in 563 he along with 12 other companions founded a monastery on Iona. It became the centre of Celtic Christianity as the monks set out to Christianize pagan Scotland.

In 635 on the north east coast of England king Oswald of Northumbria asked a monk from Iona called Aidan to come to Northumbria and bring the gospel to his people. Aidan went and established a monastery on the island called Lindisfarne or better known as holy island.

In 793 there was an intensive Viking raid on Lindisfarne.

Alcuin wrote -never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have suffered from a pagan race. The heathens poured out the blood of the saints around the altar and trampled on the bodies of saints in the temple of god.

The priory was reestablished in the 11<sup>th</sup> century under the Normans until it was suppressed in 1536 by Henry 8<sup>th</sup>.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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From Lindisfarne came such wonderful saints called Cuthbert and Bede and a woman called Hilda who a bit further down the coast in 656 an established an abbey with Hilda as the first abbess.

From Lindisfarne we got the Lindisfarne gospels and from Lindisfarne we got the establishment of Celtic Christianity in the north of England. Yet this came with a price of murder and killing and death.

Throughout history we have never been free of people murdering other people for whatever reason.

We always think of murder in terms of the taking of another ones life.

So why is it that John today in his letter says that anyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer and has no eternal life abiding in them?

Why would this new love that is demanded of Christ between his followers given such a high priority that if you do not love somebody you are deemed as a murderer?

Jesus said if you love me you will keep my commandments. Love is the commandment of Jesus. It is not a suggestion it is a commandment. Such a commandment that to fail to love another person is said to be murder by John.

We may find a clue in that other set of commandments that seem to be looked on as suggestions today. The Ten Commandments. The 6<sup>th</sup> one being you shall not murder or you shall not kill.

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The essence of that commandment is not just about the taking of another life. It is about the relationships between the children of god. I am sure that Jesus had this commandment in mind in his teachings of how to treat other people.

You see a relationship between people who say they are followers of Christ is a relationship that is founded on an understanding of gods way for us to live life and that way is found especially within a community of faith.

Those relationships in community are relationships that are to build up not break down. They are to encourage not discourage. They are to be gentle not angry. They are to be honest and not without truth. They are to be open and not with the joy of gossip. They are to be forgiving and not with the resentment of harboring grudges. They are to be kind and not with anger.

You see according to Johns understanding of Jesus teaching based on the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment if you say something bad about somebody to somebody else you have murdered part of the relationship with the person you have talked about.

Do you understand that?

If you gossip or say something bad about somebody you have murdered part of the relationship between you and that person. Part of the relationship has died.

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A resurrection community has to be different to the world in which we live and we have to be very intentional about the relationships that god has placed us with in community.

There's a wonderful story of a lady who went to confession and said I talk about people behind there backs and I gossip. The priest told her to go home, get a feather pillow, go onto the roof of her house and cut open the pillow and shake it and then come back. She did and she came back. The priest asked her what happened. She said I cut open the pillow shook it and the feathers flew all over the town. The priest asked her if it was possible to gather the feathers and stuff the pillow.

Impossible she said.

The priest said that is exactly what your words of gossip and talking about people are like. It cuts into the relationship and the words can never be retrieved.

There is an old slogan that says sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me.

That is so far from the truth of Jesus.

We are called to engage our brains before we put our mouth into action.

The most powerful muscle in our body is our tongue and we must never think that even by the words we use we can get away with murder.

Amen.

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