

Living together



Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Acts 4:32-35

It sounds so wonderful, doesn't it? The early Christian community, living in harmony, sharing all their possessions, making sure there is no one in need, worshipping God together in the light of the resurrection of Christ. It sounds so wonderful that many Christian groups have tried to replicate it since, mostly with about the enduring level of success that the early Church managed.

We know from St Paul's letters how quickly things got complicated, how soon there were complaints and disagreements. Some were seen to be getting more money or food, or being let off certain regulations. Fingers were pointed, harsh words were said, and leaders were written to. Once the first enthusiasm of the new faith began to wear off, practicality necessarily reasserted

itself. Rules were written, hierarchies established, and officers appointed. And here we are, at our point in the history of a Christian Church that has not always distinguished itself in the areas of kindness, equality and care for the weakest.

But the Church is here. It is here because of who God is, and because of who we are. Human beings are not designed to live together in complete equality. We owe our very survival to being competitive. We are creative and can see better ways of doing things. That energy, of competitiveness and creativity, has spread the Gospel throughout the world. So let us be kind, to ourselves as well as to others, and know our limitations, so readily forgiven by God. 🙏

Forgive us, Lord, when we fail to live in harmony with others. Forgive our greed, our self-righteousness and our unkindness. Help us to be the best we can be and to rejoice in your power to remake us in your image. Amen.

Holy places

Lindisfarne

by Heather Smith

The Holy Island of Lindisfarne, just off the Northumbrian coast, is a popular place of pilgrimage.

The island is cut off at high tide, and for centuries visitors had to cross the sand to get there. Up until 1954 there were special high taxis to take you, although a causeway has since been built. Travel across it with careful attention to the tides and find yourself in the place that was known by Finian,

Bishop of Northumbria (651-661) and Northumbria's patron saint, Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne. The famous Lindisfarne Gospels were produced here in the eighth century.

St Aidan arrived in Northumbria in around AD 634 at the request of King Oswald and chose it as the place for a priory. This was to be the base from which he restored Christianity to the kingdom.

Today the Community of Aidan and Hilda holds retreats here and you can stay at their house, the Open Gate. Their approach is in the Celtic tradition and you might find a week based around the fantastic nature on the island, or on mysticism, or Aidan and Hilda themselves. 🙏

“The Bible without the Holy Spirit is a sundial by moonlight.”

Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), American evangelist and publisher

Walking with Poppy

Surprise!

by Gillian Cooper

I tell Poppy that Janet is coming to see her. My sister is Poppy's favourite person in the world and she looks up with bright eyes when I say the name. But no sign yet, so she settles down to snooze. Eventually I wake her and encourage her outside

and to the end of the path. A car pulls up and Poppy is off, the aches and pains of old age quite forgotten, her tail wagging so hard that she almost falls over. There is much kissing and exclaiming. Poppy experiences the joy of a delightful surprise. For her, every good thing brings happiness that is fresh and new.

We sometimes forget to be surprised by Easter. We repeat the story, year after year. We remember the doubt of Thomas, who like us had not seen for himself. We may need instead to share his joyful astonishment when the impossible turned out to be true. 🙏