

Iona Pilgrimage

Pershore Abbey Iona Service 5pm Sunday 23rd January 2022

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WELCOME

GATHERING SONG: 🎵 **God welcomes all, strangers and friends.
God's love is strong and it never ends. (x3)**

INTRODUCTION

OPENING RESPONSES: (IAWB p57)

Leader: Creator of the world, eternal God,

ALL: **we have come from many places for a little while.**

Leader: Redeemer of humanity, God-with-us,

ALL: **we have come with all our differences, seeking common ground.**

Leader: Spirit of unity, go-between God,

ALL: **we have come on journeys of our own, to a place where journeys meet.**

Leader: So here, in this shelter house, let us take time together.

For when paths cross and pilgrims gather, there is much to share.

ALL: **In your name, three-in-one God, pattern of community. AMEN.**

THE IONA PILGRIMAGE

St Martin's Cross has marked this place of pilgrimage for over a thousand years. It is named after St Martin, a fourth-century Roman soldier, who in sharing his clothing with a poor man received a vision of Christ. After his baptism he became known for his conscientious objection to serving in the Roman army, and later became the Bishop of Tours, played an important role in the mission to the Celts. The high standing crosses of the Celtic Church suggest that worship often occurred out of doors in the midst of the power and beauty of creation: of earth, sea and sky. And the Celtic everlasting pattern of weaving vine on the cross points to the intertwining of heaven and earth. Like many others before him. George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community, thought of the island as a very thin place, with little to separate spirit and matter. On our Iona pilgrimage we look for the spiritual at the heart of the physical world.

Leader: Bless to us, O God,

ALL: **the earth beneath our feet.**

Leader: Bless to us, O God,

ALL: **the path whereon we go.**

Leader: Bless to us, O God,

ALL: **the people whom we meet. AMEN.**

The Augustine Nunnery was built around the same time as the 13th century Benedictine Abbey. The Nunnery stands at the heart of the local community, surrounded by homes, school, clinic, library and village hall. Yet its ruins, sheltering carefully tended gardens, are peaceful as well as welcoming. We can imagine the nuns, worshipping in the nave of the little chapel, sharing meals in the refectory and meeting in their Chapter House. Yet there is in fact very little historical record of these women's lives. History has focussed almost entirely on the Abbey. This echoes the way that, over the centuries, a male-dominated society and church has made women invisible. Their ministry was often in the home and local community – not in the places of power. Moreover, the subordination of women has often gone hand in hand with a neglect of the earth and an abuse of the human body.

Today some see the ancient Celtic Church as offering a greater balance between the feminine and masculine, as well as a celebration of the interweaving of matter and spirit, and an affirmation of the goodness of creation and the human body. St Brigid, for instance, in her leadership of double monasteries of men and women in the Celtic Church, stands for us a model of equality between men and women.

SONG:  There is a line of women, extending back to Eve,
whose role in shaping history God only could conceive.
And though, through endless ages, their witness was repressed,
God valued and encouraged them, through whom the world was blessed.

There is a line of women, who took on powerful men,
defying laws and scruples, to let life live again.
And though, despite their triumph, their stories stayed untold,
God kept their numbers growing, creative, strong and bold.

The Marble Quarry at the south-east corner of the island, is where the white Iona marble with green streaks of serpentine was quarried for the present-day communion table and baptismal font of the Abbey Church. Amid some of the oldest rock in the world, the marble quarry reminds us of our place in creation's history, our responsibility to care for the earth and our tendency to exploit it. The cutting frame and engine also remind us of our working lives – the work that puts food on the table and uses human skills; the hard work that in the majority world is often poorly paid. In the marble quarry we reflect on the situations in our world where natural resources have been exploited, and where human lives have been broken and left in a heap in the pursuit of wealth and power; and here we give thanks for the goodness of creation, and for the ways we can be co-creators with God.

Leader: You are above us, O God, you are beneath.
You are in the air, you are in the earth, you are beside us, you are within.
O God, you are in the betrayed and suffering people of our world
just as you were in the broken body of Jesu.
We pray now for all that concerns us.
Let us offer our own prayers both spoken and unspoken.
(Time of quiet and free prayer)

St Columba's Bay is the pebbled beach at the southern tip of the island where Columba is said to have arrived from Ireland on Pentecost Sunday in the year 563. Legend has it that, having clambered up the beach with their leather-bound boat, known as a coracle, Columba and his twelve monks climbed the hill to the west of the bay to confirm that Ireland, their beloved home country could not be seen. 'The Hill of Turning the Back to Ireland' became a landmark for them as they moved forward in mission to the Picts in the north, to the Anglo-Saxons in Northumbria, and throughout Europe, reaching as far east as western Russia. St Columba's Bay is a place of leaving behind the past and of new beginnings in pilgrimage and mission.

SONG:  **Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.**

**Lord, for that Word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze;
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us;
Lord of the Word, receive your people's praise.**

**Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.**

The Machair, which simply means 'raised beach', is the common land on the west side of the island overlooking the 'Bay at the Back of the Ocean'. For centuries it was used as a cornfield for the Celtic Monastery and later by the Benedictines. The islanders also cultivated it, increasing the fertility with seaweed and hard work. The ridges of the lazy beds in the *runrig* system (a way of sharing land fairly) can still be seen. Now it is used in turn by the farmers for common grazing. So the Machair is like a parable of sharing, of co-operation as opposed to competition. Here we share our lunch together and give thanks, remembering that we are called to share the gifts of God with one another and with the poor of the world.

A Grace from Christian Aid:

Leader: We long for a world

ALL: **where food is joyfully shared,**

Leader: where welcome is abundant,

ALL: **where compassion reaches all.**

Leader: As we work towards your kingdom, we thank you God,

ALL: **for food for the journey. AMEN.**

The Hermit's Cell, now only a secluded ring of stones, is situated towards the north of the island. These stones, which may be the remains of a sheep fold, possibly also mark the site of a Celtic beehive hut. Over the centuries this has been a place of solitude. There are accounts of Columba spending time alone in prayer on the island, and it may be that this was his place of hermitage. Times of solitude and silence undergird the busyness and demands of living interwoven in community. As well as hearing the word of God through the scriptures, through creation and through one another, we experience the word of God deep within us, at the very heart of all being.

Psalm 19 verses 1 - 6

ALL: The heavens proclaim the glory of God and firmament declares your handiwork.

Reader: Day speaks to day of your story; night unto night makes it known;

No speech, no word, no voice is heard.

Yet their message fills the world, their news reaches the ends of the earth.

High above, you pitched your tent for the sun to rest and rise.

Like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like an athlete eager to race:

it springs from the edge of the earth and runs its course across the sky

till it reaches the far horizon; nothing is deprived of its warmth.

ALL: The heavens proclaim the glory of God and firmament declares your handiwork.

Dun I, which simply means the hill of Iona, is the highest point on the island, 102 metres above sea level. The pilgrimage may climb to the top, or pause at another high place. At the north-easter tip of the island is the Wite Stand of the Monks, where late in the 9th century the Abbot and fifteen monks were martyred. And earlier in that century at Martyr’s Bay sixty eight monks had been slaughtered at the hands of Norse invaders. Iona, the holy island of peace, has known its own bloodshed and struggle.

In the biblical tradition, mountains or hills have been understood as places of new vision and transfiguration. Also in the bible, the sea is portrayed as a place of risk which can suddenly and unpredictably blow into storm. If Iona is like a hilltop experience of new perspective, then often the places that we return to are more like the dangerous seas. On Dun I we begin to refocus on those places of struggle in our world that we belong to and are aware of, and we offer a prayer for peace.

Universal prayer of peace

**All: Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth.
 Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
 Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace.
 Let peace fill our lives, our world, our universe. Peace, peace, peace.**

St Oran’s Chapel, in the island’s graveyard, by the main gate of the Abbey grounds, is the oldest building on Iona. It was built in the twelfth century. Oran lived six centuries before and is remembered as the first Columban monk to die and be buried on Iona.

The area became known as the Reilig Oran (or graveyard of Oran). Many Scottish kings and Lords of the Isles, as well as Irish and Norse kings are said to be buried here. A graveyard may seem an odd place to end the Iona pilgrimage, but in the Christian Church we celebrate that it was in a graveyard that the resurrection faith began, and it is often in places of death and apparent hopelessness that new beginnings are given.

Our prayer is that though the self-giving and deaths of Oran and Columba and the many other women and men who have gone before, us we may be granted the strength and vision to continue on the journey of Jesus.

BLESSING:

**All: May God be a bright flame before us
 be a guiding star above you,
 be a smooth path below you,
 be a kindly shepherd behind you,
 today, tomorrow and for ever. Amen**

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The next Pershore Abbey Iona service will be at 5pm on Sunday 27th February

Pilgrimage to Iona 4th – 10th June 2022

Please contact Michael Hodges (01386 552417 or mh@broadwayplc.com) to reserve a place or obtain more information about this week on the theme of Wildlife, staying in the Iona Community’s accommodation on the isle Iona and taking part in the pilgrimage around the island. Michael needs to make a booking in the next month or the places will go!