

# St. David

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Date: 01 March 2015

Preacher: Dr. Olav Slaymaker

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you so much, Howie. Before I get on to this mysterious overhead, I'd just like to say together with us a prayer from the intercession at our communion service.

We remember before thee, O Lord, all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear. And we bless thy holy name for all who in life and death have glorified thee, beseeching thee to give us grace that, rejoicing in their fellowship, we may follow their good examples, and with them be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. Amen. St. David of Wales is the subject today. And the connection between St. David of Wales and the map which is shown on the overhead is perhaps a little obscure.

It represents an excuse on the part of the speaker for the flimsy nature of the evidence that surrounds the person of St. David.

And to make the explicit connection, the title of this map is the distribution of marked stones and ogons in Wales between the period of 400 to 700 A.D.

[ 1 : 38 ] The life of our St. David, which is not known with great precision, but there's some confidence that he died in 589 A.D., but his birth date seems to be extremely uncertain.

He's a 6th century saint. But St. David's life overlaps exactly with the time in Wales when virtually the only evidence that was available to the person in the street was marked stones and ogons, which are a form of early British language, the forebearer of Welsh.

And they are not comprehensive in any sense of the history of the time. So why show this?

Well, because the evidence, which is based on the life of St. David, which was written 500 years after his death, draws on myth and legend, and we cannot with any confidence ascribe these events to a factual series of happenings.

What we do know is that St. David had enormous influence, and we look at the effects of St. David's life on the life of Wales in a number of dimensions as we move forward.

[ 3 : 12 ] But I suppose the first thing to do is to ask whether anybody knows where that map is located. One of our distinguished colleagues asked me if it was a map of Spain when I came in.

I have to say no. It's a map of Wales cunningly devised to blot out anything of the influence of England, and it simply plots the locations that were obviously inhabited and settled to the point of building these large stones with detailed descriptions, this and that, and some of them without detailed descriptions of anything but simply some characteristic symbols.

But I thought at the same time as wanting to show that this is the sort of problem that we have in reconstructing the life of St. David, but also the fact that an awful lot of activity was focused in the southwestern corner of Wales, which is where St. David's Cathedral is now located, where St. David himself was born.

He was a Welshman, in case anyone wishes to question that. And the location of St. David itself is right on the end of this peninsula here, and is the focus of the legend and tradition around St. David. So let me just start by asking whether you are familiar with a play by William Shakespeare called Henry V, and whether you have heard of a character called Flewellyn.

[ 5 : 11 ] Now, Flewellyn, of course, is an admission on the part of the author that he was unable to pronounce shh, which is a first test this morning.

For those of you who do not know the Welsh shh, it takes a certain amount of practice to get it right. Obviously Shakespeare couldn't, so he spelled it F, Flewellyn.

But it should have been Flewellyn. I just quote, the most internationally recognised symbol of Wales is, of course, the leek, which largely comes from a reference in Shakespeare's Henry V, Act V, Scene 1.

I'm not quoting this from memory, as you can see. Flewellyn says, King Henry says, I wear it for a memorable honour, for I am Welsh, you know, good countryman.

So you see the royal line of Wales in the Tudor family. One of the legends to which this tradition of wearing a leek in the hat of the armies of the Welsh as they fought against those terrible English invaders is that St. David had recommended that this be worn as a way of frightening the opposition.

[ 7 : 06 ] I don't know. You see what I say, it's a little difficult in reconstructing the times. A simple crash course in Welsh gives us the following information.

In Welsh, everything is back to front. Not backward, but back to front. Merry Christmas is Christmas Merry. Not all like Fawen.

St. David is Dewi Sant. All the adjectives follow the nouns and you have to be careful when you read the information.

Secondly, in Welsh, everything is changeable. That is to say, words mutate depending on the last letter of the previous word. If you look up the word for chapel it is straightforwardly chapel.

However, the Welsh for the chapel is unhapple. So the mutation is confusing because you can't find it in the dictionary.

[ 8 : 15 ] In Welsh, vowels are sometimes consonants, especially Ws. My home neighbourhood in Swansea, for example, was called Cunguin.

In this word, the first W is a vowel, the second W is a consonant, and the Y is a vowel. So, on one occasion, mail was not delivered.

A mailman not recognising recognising that Welsh had some interesting ways of pronouncing things. And finally, the biggest challenge is pronouncing the double L.

There's a prize for anyone who can pronounce the name of the town Llanethli, which was the town in which our most dangerous opponents in rugby lived.

But Llanethli has got these two double L's. Makes it a little bit of tongue twisted. So, to go to more serious matters, as far as Welsh history is concerned, with apologies to Sheila, who knows everything about history, the Romans departed by 410 A.D.

[ 9 : 26 ] And St. David lived between approximately 500 and 589 A.D. So this is very early on in the rearrangement of the affairs of the country.

The nations of the Welsh, the English, and the Scots crystallised in this period of time. And written evidence is limited. And we can see from following slides that there was a considerable fight between Britons and English.

The Britons being the Celtic fringe, who were constantly being pushed back into the western mountains. And it's not too easy to see from the back of the room, but those names that are underlined are all Britons, and those that are in boxes are English.

And the history of the period of the next few hundred years was that of constant attack from the East and the Welsh were in retreat.

As this was happening, the Celtic church was evolving and you may be able to see a mother church was established here in Shantwit Major, which is close to between Cardiff and Swansea, and various places, such as St.

[ 11 : 13 ] David's, became important. You've seen that right here on the end of the peninsula. And, I'll stop these maps in a moment, but you can't stop geographers from seeing the producing maps.

But this gives us the line, and this is much later, 1067 to 1099, because when William the Conqueror came about, he was anxious to conquer everybody.

And these were the March on Lords, the Earl of Shoresbury and Montgomery, the Earl of Herifel and so on who proceeded to build fortresses.

And if you ever go to Wales, you'll see so many places where there are castles which were built by the March on Lords in order to try to achieve the control of the Welsh territory.

And this, of course, eventually was successful. And let me just show, finally, or semi-finally I should say, the distribution of monasteries and dioceses.

[ 12 : 28 ] And here is the St. David's diocese right throughout the southwestern part of Wales with a constant struggle between various parts of the Welsh church life, which was represented by the interactions between those parts of the country.

And finally, just to give you the summary of what's happened today, is a map of the distribution of Welsh speakers in Wales.

and the dark coloured areas are the areas with the largest proportion of Welsh speaking people. So out of the 3 million people in Wales, about 20% are Welsh speakers.

Some of these places have 80 to 100% Welsh speakers, but there's only one person living there.

This gives you a rather distorted impression of the massive number of Welsh people.

But they have, as you can see, been driven to the western limits of the principality. One interesting thing with respect to the location of St.

[13:51] David's, it sits really at a boundary between Welsh speakers and English speakers. And this part of Pembrokeshire is generally referred to as Little England Beyond Wales.

It's guarded by a series of magnificent castles, but it's not clear who was defending, who were against whom. So it's very often a question when you are there, when you ask the question, what was this castle for, to know exactly what its purpose was.

But in general, of course, it was to subdue the locals and make the locals feel less important in the overall situation.

Now, let me come to the subject of David. I just want to make a few comments about the Celtic church tradition, which was evolving at the same time as St.

David was becoming a bishop of the Roman church. The distinctively Welsh Celtic tradition can be summed up in three terms.

[15:08] It is Trinitarian, Incarnational, and Cosmic. The Celtic awareness of God as the communion of the three in one resulted in a strong emphasis on community.

The Celtic emphasis on the incarnational Christian tradition led to a sense of perseverance, hope, and a sense of purpose, and led also to an emphasis on the physical body being involved in the development of a mature spirituality.

There is a magnificent book called *The Loves of Taliesin*, which is described as one of the greatest works of medieval Welsh religious literature. And finally, as you are probably all aware of, the cosmic emphasis, Almighty Creator, it is you who made the land and the sea, his starting point of the affirmation that David was responsible for developing, apparently.

The glory of God shines through all his works, said David, apparently. The seventh century inscription on a famous stone in a church in a place called Lland Lland Lland Brevi, which means the church of St.

David on the tributary river Brevi, which is in turn a tributary of the Tyvee river, for those who know it. But each word has a meaning, of course, and the word Lland, double L-A-N, means the church.

[16:52] And it's an interesting indication of the extent to which the Christian faith has affected every part of Wales, that the most common place name has got the word Llan in it, and that this is something that we have to think of as an effect of St.

David's ministry. So the way in which this Celtic tradition was evolving, and the influence of the Roman church was spreading, involved some tension between the Britons and the English, and of course respect for the Vatican also played its part in this kind of struggle.

There is an enormous amount of religion in Wales. There's an enormous amount of spirituality in Wales. There's also, of course, an enormous amount of hypocrisy.

And the challenge in all this is to see how the dedication and the life of someone like St. David has influenced and permeated the life of Wales.

Any of you who have ever had the opportunity of attending a rugby union match, or rugby football match, in Cardiff, where 100,000 people sing in part the major hymns of the non-conformist tradition, will have had a sense of how deeply ingrained that religious tradition is.

[18:57] But of course, not all the 100,000 people present have any idea of what they're singing about. So let me finally come then to sources.

Much of our knowledge of Devisant, or St. David, comes from Rigevar, who was the son of Cillian, the bishop of St. David's. Some 500 years after St.

David's death, he wrote a detailed account of his life in something which I won't attempt to trouble you with, which was written in both Welsh and Latin.

It's the life of St. David, but in Welsh it sounds a bit more complicated. There are also extra details concerning St. David from the hand of the famous travel writer and medieval social commentator Gerald of Wales.

Both these men used ancient sources and texts when penning St. David's story and were very concerned that Rome recognized him as a fully canonized saint of the Catholic Church and that he

was a legitimate archbishop of the pre-Augustinian Church in Britain and a patron to the ancient British people's Cymru.

[ 20 : 16 ] So the campaign of these two gentlemen was successful and in 1120 Pope Calixtus II canonized David naming him the patron saint of the Welsh.

Indeed, at that point, two pilgrimages to St. David's were decreed to be equivalent to one to Rome. So that's not bad for a distant corner of the world and St.

David's influence obviously was direct in that way. Just one aside for a moment. as I was preparing this and I acknowledge that my depth of preparation is not as great as it might have been.

I was just commanded to give this presentation. When I'm commanded to give this presentation, I just have to do it. But anyway, a thought that came to me more and more forcibly as I tried to find out what were the facts of the situation, how fortunate we are with the scriptures, the extent of the evidence, the extent of the written material that was produced such a short time after the death and resurrection of Christ.

I mean, 20 years probably, a minimum estimate of the time between the resurrection and ascension and the first putting down of the facts of the gospel in place.

[ 21 : 48 ] Here we have something 500 years later, which is indescribably less detailed in the sourcing and the evidence that's available.

So I think it's worth reflecting on that when people shrug their shoulders and say, that Bible is really a bunch of myth and fiction.

it's clearly as well attested and far better attested than most of the events of that period. So let me then say the life of St.

David's from approximately 500 to about 589. He was apparently born and died on March the 1st, which makes one wonder. During his missionary activity and his reconfirming and revitalizing the faith of his people, David gathered around him a community of disciples, men from the town and villages he had preached in.

After discerning the will of God, they were led to a place called Glyn Rossin in order to found a monastery. And this monastery is now the site of St.

[ 23 : 11 ] David's Cathedral. If you haven't been to St. David's Cathedral, may I urge you to put it on your bucket list. It is totally different from any other cathedral in the UK.

It is squat, long, hiding behind low hills. It's just part of the landscape and is absolutely beautiful. And as Paul has just reminded me this morning that service from St. David's Cathedral, which was broadcast this morning for St.

David's Day, shows the continuity of the tradition of choral singing that was initiated in that location. So the young David grew up to be a priest educated in a monastery at Hen Bunwy under the tutorage of a saint Paulinus.

As David's monastery flourished, a rule was established. The monks lived only on bread with salt and herbs for sustenance. They consumed no alcohol, drank only water, no meat eating was permitted.

[ 24 : 28 ] They weren't allowed draft animals such as oxen and had to pull the plough themselves. They bathed in cold water so as to keep their bodies free from passion.

Actually, sometimes bathing in glacier meltwater raises the passions quite markedly, but this is the official story.

They had to spend the evenings in prayer, reading and writing. No personal possessions were allowed, even to say my book was considered an offence.

Monastery life was very strict and the brothers had to work very hard. Many crafts were followed, beekeeping in particular was very important. The monks had to keep themselves fed as well as provide food and lodging for travellers and they looked after the poor in the community.

On the basis of the lives of the Welsh saints, Oliver Davis in a book published in 1996 suggests that there were broadly three types of monasteries in Wales. There were major monastic centres such as the Llandwit Major location that I mentioned which is now followed up by English people and this is a large monastery where the community was not as ascetic in character as others.

[ 25 : 58 ] Then there's a second kind of monastery which David retreated to from Llandwit Major to Caldy Island. Caldy Island is located just off the coast here at Tenby also in Pembrokeshire and this was more rigorous and David's lifestyle and David's rule developed on that island.

And then finally there's a further type of monastic lifestyle involving rejection of Caldy Island as being much too secular I guess. So they retreat to a cave where a more uncompromising vocation could be pursued.

David himself never went to that extent. St. David came to be known as David Aquaticus for those whose Latin fails them David the water man or the water drinker in Welsh.

Mainly for his ideal of temperance during a time when getting drunk by drinking mead seemed a daily obligation for so many men but also for the large number of baptisms that he performed. Sometimes it's said as a self-imposed penance he would stand up to his neck in a lake of cold water reciting scripture. It's also said that milestones during his life were marked by the appearance of springs of water.

[ 27 : 28 ] So you see the interweaving of these legends are just impossible to discriminate between. people. But his fame as a spiritual leader became widespread and many people came to hear him preach or to seek guidance and advice in the Christian life.

After spending very many of his early years in Wales he decided to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the early 540s with a number of other saints, St.

Tylo and St. Paddon and all three were consecrated bishops by the patriarch of Jerusalem, John through the third. Just as they returned home the British church was in the midst of a crisis. one of the leading clerics of the church, Pelagius, had been preaching heresy and this false doctrine was causing discord and disunity. And the bishops of Britain, including two Welsh bishops, invited David to address an emergency synod at this place, Hlenlewy Brevi, which I mentioned earlier.

And this was around 560 AD. During this meeting, David spoke so eloquently against the heresy of Pelagianism that the synod appointed David as archbishop.

[ 29 : 00 ] Who knows what Pelagianism is? This is a very well-versed group of... We're not allowed to ask mathematics professors about this.

Yes? My answer is approximate, but it overemphasizes free will or willpower. We can't do our own efforts to keep the law or obey the law. Precisely. Yeah.

This was the emphasis. And so David preached with characteristic Welsh oil against this heresy. Pelagius, by the way, existed between, lived between 354 and 440. For some reason, there are more precise states on that. But it's just before the synod at which the Pelagianism was finally defeated.

There followed another synod at Carolean, the so-called Synod of Victory, around 569 AD, and that reinforced the position of the English Church, the Welsh and English Church, on the matter of human beings earning salvation by their own efforts.

[ 30 : 26 ] St. David preached his last sermon, again, who knows, on the last Sunday in February, just in time for St. David's Day, at a mass that was attended by a great crowd of people.

During the sermon, St. David is said to have exhorted his disciples, Lords, brothers and sisters, be joyful, and keep the faith and the creed, and also do the little things that you heard and saw me do. I will walk the path that our fathers have trod before us. It is perhaps for these words that he is best remembered. Do ye the little things in life, which is a very well-known phrase in the original Welsh, which again I will spare you from.

But this has become a characterization of St. David. I say a few things about the legends beyond what I have been able to sort out as being close to the facts, just to give you a sense of how his reputation grew under the influence stories and traditions that built up around him.

He was born of a union between Sant, the younger son of the patriarch and king of Ceredigion, Ceredigion being the southwestern part of Wales, and St.

[ 32 : 16 ] None, a holy woman and nun who was founder of several shrines and holy wells within the kingdom. Now this is an interesting story which I think is so apocryphal that I will leave it.

But he was born during a violent storm whilst None sought shelter near the edge of a cliff. God granted her this making radiant and peaceful the spot where she delivered.

And the site is now and has been ever since that time a place of pilgrimage known as the Chapel of St. None. So if indeed you do go to St. David's Cathedral, the Chapel of St.

None is immediately adjacent and marks the apparently miraculous delivery of St. David. During his baptism David is said to have performed two miracles.

First of all a spring appeared at an appointed site so that he could be baptized and secondly the priest who held him during the sacrament was blind but when David was reborn in the waters of new life the priest recovered his sight.

[ 33 : 29 ] A similar wonder occurred when the saint went to Whitland to be schooled for the priesthood by St. Paulinus. The holy teacher was beginning to lose his sight and asked the saintly boy to bless his eyes and upon doing so Paulinus was able to see clearly once more.

But his best known miracle is said to have taken place when he was preaching in the middle of a large crowd at the synod of Brevi. The village of Flendevi Brevi stands on the spot where the ground on which he stood is reputed to have risen up to form a small hill.

A white dove which became his emblem was seen settling on his shoulder. John Davis, the author of a recent history of Wales, notes that one can scarcely conceive of any miracle more superfluous in that part of Wales than the creation of a new hill.

some personal recollections.

I was very fond of St. David, even though I knew nothing about him. Every year on March the 1st, if we were in school, we were expected to turn up at school for the morning assembly at nine o'clock.

[ 34 : 51 ] A traditional song would be sung, after which the headmaster would wish us a happy St. David's Day and formally dismiss us. So from the age of seven to the age of nineteen, I had all those free mornings, which I didn't use as profitably as I might have, but nevertheless we looked forward to St.

David's Day. celebrations usually involved a tebach, which is a Welsh fruit bread, and teisenbach, which is a Welsh cake.

Young girls are encouraged to wear national costume, well they used to be, I'm not sure whether they still are, leeks for men, and daffodils for women, Professor Lay.

Again, we refer to the battle against the Saxons, at which David advised his soldiers to wear leeks in their hats so they could easily be distinguished from their enemies and frighten them.

So then, St.

[ 36 : 15 ] David must have been a remarkable, spiritually minded, clear-thinking Christian. It's hard for us to put ourselves in that position where suddenly there was a vacuum in terms of the influence of the Roman Empire on the local society, and the fact that the majority of the population could neither read nor write.

The gospel was being introduced, in most cases, for the first time. There were marauding English persons, but I've forgotten to mention, the marauding Vikings, for obvious reasons.

I didn't feel appropriate to mention them, but the whole of the church, as it was evolving at that time, was under pressure.

It wasn't just that the Welsh were under pressure, but the whole survival of the Christian church was under pressure. And it seems to me that we can give thanks to God for this extraordinary influence that David seems to have had in injecting a deep sense of spirituality into the Welsh nation.

religion. Now, there's much more that can be said, of course, with respect to the influence of the Methodist revival in Wales as reinforcing that whole tradition.

[ 38 : 03 ] It's quite fortuitous that we're going to hear about George Whitefield next week, and the Welsh revival was very much associated with George Whitefield.

Such names as Howell Harris of Talyoth, Griffith Jones of Llan Lauror, Daniel Rowland of Llan Gaiður, notice the name Llan comes up almost everywhere, and William Williams of Pantachellen, all contributed to the creation of the Welsh non-conformist tradition, which built on this sense of the religiosity, which had been inculcated from a very early time.

Some of this will seem rather abstract to you because you don't read Welsh, but then neither do I. But there has appeared within the last decade a series of books in English which are specifically describing the history and the traditions of Wales.

And I can give you a list of those if you wish after the talk. So more is concluded in my reading of the sources, more is concluded from the effects that St.

David had than from the actual events of his life. Now what can you do? He didn't write anything, he didn't put up an ogham or a standing stone, he didn't produce any actual music or hymnody.

[ 39 : 57 ] All of these things have been corrected quite extensively by Welsh preachers and writers subsequently. 60 of the parishes of Wales are dedicated to St.

David. The next most common is his dedication to St. Tylo who had 25 parishes dedicated to his memory.

So that, a simple statistic, gives an indication of how venerated St. David is in the history of saints. So again, a final comment in terms of my own recollections. We were indeed happy to sing a song on St.

David's Day. we were indeed happy to celebrate St. David, but we were not given too much information. Now I know why.

[ 41 : 11 ] But it seems to me that we did, the school, and I think generally the schools, did miss an opportunity of pointing to the influence of the early Welsh saints.

there are a large number of them. I have not said anything about this large number, but critical to the survival of the church must have been the witness of these early saints.

Here I stand as a former member of the Plymouth Brethren, lording a saint, when in fact every one of us is a saint in God's eyes.

So this is a mysterious thing. One's perspective changes over time. But I can see now that the challenges faced by those early Christians in Wales must have been enormous.

it was a completely inaccessible place from the main centres of civilisation at the time, and they were, and one can group David with St.

[ 42 : 30 ] Patrick of Ireland, because Patrick also was a pioneer in the same general time period. they must have had the most amazing challenge in getting the gospel to people without any manuscript evidence, with any ability of the people they were speaking to, to read or write.

And I just thank God for this saintly St. David of Wales. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.