

The flame and the struggle

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[0:00] You are everything. My soul, my soul must sing.

! It must sing we thank you so much for all that you have done.

We thank you so much that you pour your love into our hearts by your Holy Spirit. And I just thank you that that word poured is a word of extravagance.

It's a word of a mighty waterfall, not of a dripping tap. We receive that love again this morning because you are a gift, your gracious, generous, extravagant God.

Thank you. Lord, lift us into your holy presence.

[1:38] Father, I pray for each person here this morning, however we are, however we've come. I pray that by your Spirit you will touch our lives.

God, you know our need. Reach deep within us. We just give you permission today to come. we say, please come to me. Please speak into my heart, into my life, into my mind.

Renew my mind. Open up my heart and my will to love you and to serve you in deeper ways.

Help us to hear you today. Amen. Amen. Well, it's great to be back.

[2:54] John, bless you. Thank you for your invitation. I'm going to be real cheeky because as I was preparing what I wanted to say this morning, I realized that unless you were going to be here half the afternoon, I couldn't say it all in one go.

So I'm hoping that you'll be kind enough to have me back again. I realized that I wanted to talk about some of the roots, the ancient truths, the ancient vision that God laid on his people in scriptural times and that God birthed in our own nation back in the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh centuries.

I want to begin to just unpack a little bit of that. But when I started to think about the specific inheritance of Hilda, I began to realize how much there was.

And I realized that if we are to talk in any sensible and practical way about re-digging the old wells, and I think that's a concept that some of you are familiar with, if we were to talk about that in detail, if we were to be practical, if we're going to look at what it actually means for 21st century Whitby, then we have to begin with some underlying stuff.

And it's that that I want to look at this morning. And I want to do that within the context of this strange title that I gave to John earlier in the week, The Flame and the Struggle, a Celtic vision energized by the power of God and earthed on the streets of Whitby.

[4:49] The Flame and the Struggle, a Celtic vision energized by the power of God and earthed on the streets of Whitby. And I want to take you, if you've got a Bible, into the first chapter of 2 Corinthians.

What I love about St. Paul is that he gets really, really excited about the gospel of Jesus Christ. But he is also very real and very honest about life. And it's those two things that I want to talk about today because there they are in the first chapter of 2 Corinthians.

But there they are within the characters who are forefathers and mothers. That absolute excitement and given-overness to the wonders of salvation, to the greatness of God and at the same time that utter reality that we live life as it really is.

Not as we would pretend, not as we would like it to be, but as it really is. So I'm going to pick out some parts of this first chapter and I want to begin in verse 3.

[6:28] We've had the opening greetings from Paul as an apostle of Jesus Christ. So from him and from Timothy, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Now there's a profound spiritual truth really to begin with, isn't there? there is God's presence with us in the rubbish of this world and God's comfort, God's blessing in those times is something that we then have as treasure to share with others who are going through the same kind of pain.

Verse 5, For just as the suffering of Christ flows over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer.

[8:26] so be careful when you pray for patience because God only knows one way of giving it to you.

Suffering. you can't grow the fruit of the Spirit without hardship. That's the only way it happens, friends.

I don't know whether they told you that when you gave your heart to Jesus either, but it's true. So don't feel guilty when hardship comes. Dare to rejoice that God is on your case.

He's in the transformation business. He will produce patient endurance through the sufferings that we suffer.

And our hope for you, says Paul, is firm because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia.

[9:41] This is honesty time, folks. We are under, we were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.

Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely upon ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

I had an experience as part of my calling to Holy Island. The whole story takes a very long time, but the last bit of it, Ruth and I had gone to the island just to seek God there.

And we were feeling increasingly sure that this was the place. And went to bed on this particular Saturday evening in the last week of January nine years ago.

and about five o'clock in the morning my mind is scrolling all the reasons why we shouldn't do this.

[11:00] Do you go into that kind of rational mode? Well, you know, there was no job, there was no salary, there was no house, there was no pension, there was nothing.

But God was saying come. Now, my rational mind didn't like that greatly. It was kind of protesting in the early hours and I dozed a bit after that and we got up and we went to the early morning communion service at St.

Mary's, the old Book of Common Prayer service at eight o'clock. And I know exactly where I was sat. it only gets a very small congregation.

We were in the choir stalls and I was four along from the end on the right hand side. And the first reading was St.

Paul talking about the cost of ministry, talking about his beatings and his chains and his shipwrecks. You know that bit? And then the gospel reading was the pearl of great price.

[12:19] Giving up everything for the one thing. And I'm sitting and I'm looking at the communion table and I can see what it cost Jesus, his body and his blood.

And then God whispered in my ear, God speak. Now, I think there are only three occasions in my life when I've heard God speak. Like, really heard.

And I did that day. But God is always very economical with words in my experience. If you hear a long waffly prophecy, most of it won't be God.

Some of it probably is, but most of it won't be, because God does not waffle. God said four words to me. I'd been listening to Paul.

I'd been engaging with the sacrifice of the pearl of great price. I'd looked at what it had cost his son, and God said to me, so what's your problem?

[13:29] Just four words. I knew, I knew beyond anything at that moment that I had to do it. Anything else would have been rank disobedience, I knew.

But I remember saying to Ruth afterwards, if God had to tell us that clearly, how difficult is it going to be?

You see, I'm a bit of a seasoned warrior, and I know a bit about the battle, and I know that when God tells you like that, and it's a matter of absolute obedience, then there's probably a pile of manure around the corner.

And there was, and it turned out to be the most difficult thing we've ever done. But my God is faithful, and here we are.

We had no house, we had no income, we had no official work, but God said go. And God provided for us, and we were never in the red once. We had family expenses with a house that had subsidence back in Nottingham, we couldn't sell it, we couldn't rent it, we had two kids off at university, overall our expenses were 40,000 a year.

[14:58] We had no income. God was faithful, absolutely faithful, beyond any imagining. That's the stuff that Paul's talking about here.

We do a retreat on Holy Island which is called Spirituality for When Life Goes Belly-Side-Up. It's good because it enables people to own reality in their lives and to find some ways within our growing understanding of who God is that enable us to be real with Father when life goes belly-side up.

But I want you to listen to a little bit more of Paul because he's told it straight here to the Corinthians. But if you go further on, he talks from verse 15 about how he was planning to go there on the way to Macedonia and then stop off on the way back from Macedonia and how much he cared for them and so on.

But it didn't all work out, it wasn't all straightforward. But then he says this in verse 18, But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not yes and no.

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not yes and no. But in him it has always been yes.

[16:38] For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. Whoa! I love that.

I love that. And maybe this morning God is reminding you in some way of a promise that he made to you at some point in your life and it's not yet been fulfilled.

Well, brother, sister, it is yes in Christ Jesus. So you just come back to him and say, hey father, you promised Christ, and I'm still looking and I'm still waiting and I'm still trusting you to deliver on that because that's who you are and he will.

But it's these two things, it's this extraordinary gift and richness of the gospel of the God of the yes amongst the rubbish, amongst the suffering, amongst the struggle that life sometimes is.

It's the two things. My friends, it is not either or. It is both and. And that's what Paul preaches.

[18:00] And that's what the Celtic saints preached. And lived. We can't choose which bits of scripture we like. It comes as a job lot.

Okay? It comes as a job lot and we have to grapple with the bits we don't like, the bits that aren't easy. So in a sense, that second part, the yes of God, the amen of God, the promise, the glory, the wonder, the resurrection, the Pentecost of our faith, that is the stuff that informs our vision as a community, the community of Aidan and Hilda, of which I am a guardian.

And as part of the service where people take vows, we have some quite remarkable words. God is giving you a vision of a spoiled creation being restored to harmony with its creator, of a fragmented world becoming whole, of a weakened church being restored to its mission, of lands being healed and lit up by the glorious Trinity.

Now that's a big picture. That's not a little picture of personal salvation. God loves you and gave his life for you and if you'd been the only person here, he'd have still come.

That's the wonder of the gospel of Jesus. But you know, it's a bit bigger than that. when we read in John, God so loved the world.

[19:54] That word in the original is not human beings, it's cosmos. God so loved the cosmos that he gave his son.

That's a big salvation. God intends to redeem the cosmos. not just you and me. Not just the church of Jesus Christ.

We'll be at the forefront of it, but God is inviting you to be part of that redemption to bring the glory of the gospel to fullness.

That's what Romans 8 is about. That Everest peak within the Himalayas of the letter of Romans. the whole creation groaning in travail, waiting for the sons of God, waiting for you and me to grow up. That's what the original actually says. Waiting for us to become who God wants us to be in Christ. Okay?

[21:09] So you and I are part of that salvation process. We are here to help bring in the kingdom that is going to change the world.

And that doesn't mean just planet earth either. Think about it. Just look up into the night sky, get into a dark place in the middle of the moor one night and lie down and look up.

there's a lot of it. There's a lot of it. And you can only see bit of this particular bit of God's world. Bits of this galaxy. Just bits of it you can see. But you know, they tell us now that as far as they know there are over 350 billion galaxies.

God's got a lot of redeeming to do. This is the cosmic Christ who is portrayed in John, who we read of in those amazing verses in Colossians chapter 1 that we read a bit more about in the beginning of Ephesians.

[22:35] This is the size of the gospel. one of the problems though is that we can be Christians who are so caught up in this glory and this vision that we lose touch with the reality.

And that's why I said it's both and in Paul's preaching. Because a vision is nothing unless it's earthed in prayerful action.

If not, it's just a dream and it fades when we wake up and at worst it can become an escape or a delusion through which to avoid realities which we would rather not face.

I don't know whether you were part of church some years ago when all the emphasis was on revival. people. And in some ways that's a wonderful thing.

But in some ways it was an escape. There was so much talk and prayer and worship and longing for this magic wand that God was going to wave.

[23:50] People were not actually earthed in doing the business of sharing the gospel with their next door neighbour, of talking at the bus stop, of loving the person down the road who's just been bereaved, of caring for the person who doesn't have enough to eat, of setting up the food bank, of going and loving and caring for the prostitute, for the goth, for the whoever.

It became disconnected. And we need that fervent prayer in the glory of the gospel of God. And together we need to be living the life.

Ian Bradley, a man who's written quite a lot about Celtic spirituality, he's actually one of the advisors to our community. And he wrote an interesting book called Celtic Christianity, Making Myths and Chasing Dreams.

Christians. And what he exposed was that many times over the last thousand years, people have taken the gleams of light from the dark ages, which we call Celtic Christianity, and they've used them as a kind of accessory to their own agenda.

And Celtic Christianity has come to be a load of fluff. It's come to be nothing more than Enya and Irish mists, romance and escapism.

[25:29] Oh my, let me tell you it isn't. When you meet the real Celtic saints, the dedication, the radical discipleship, the love of Jesus, the following of Christ, I mean let me just go through a few aspects of that spirituality, which I hope you will recognize in your own.

They were a people utterly sold out in taking up their cross and following Christ. They were a people passionate to know, to believe and to live the scriptures.

They took scripture incredibly seriously. If God said pray, they prayed. If God said fast, they fasted. You know, they just took it seriously.

They were a people filled with the spirit. A people of utterly orthodox Trinitarian faith. A people who knew and loved the creation and were in awe of the creator.

A people whose lives were characterized by prayer in all things and for all things. A people with an acute awareness of evil and of the necessity of spiritual warfare.

[26:54] A people driven to care for the poor by godly compassion and a deep sense of God's justice. A people who understood both the personal responsibility of the Christian life and the accountability of living in community.

These were remarkable people. This is Aidan. This is Hilda. This is Cuthbert. This is Patrick, Mungo, Bridget, David, Kevin, Kieran, Sed, Chad, Hilted, Samson.

I mean, you know, the list goes on and on. Do you know these people? These are your forebears in the faith.

These are members of the great cloud of witnesses. These are the people who God used to bring revival to our land in the past.

Why do we look back like that? Why is it necessary? Well, because God tells us to do it in a number of places. And let me just pick out two of those. Jeremiah chapter 6 verse 16.

[28:22] The context is Judah and Jerusalem under siege. Everything is falling apart because the people have forsaken the ways of God.

And Jeremiah brings this word. This is what the Lord says. Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for, what does he say, ask for?

Ask for the ancient paths. Ask where the good way is and walk in it. And you will find rest for your souls.

Ask for the ancient paths. These are the old ways of God's faithfulness. The old ways of God's covenant love.

The old ways of discipleship. Look back and learn. God's love. We see it again in Isaiah chapter 51 verses 1 and 2.

[29:27] Now here the people of Israel are lost. They are actually in exile. They've become a minority group in an alien and foreign land.

And this is what God says. Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were cut.

Look to the quarry from which you were hewn. Look back to Abraham your father and to Sarah who gave you birth. death. Why?

Well very simply because all the surety that they had had or thought they had was in their homes, in the temple, in Jerusalem and it's all gone.

Their world has fallen apart and they're wondering whether God is alive, whether God cares, whether God still is the powerful God who could do something.

[30:36] They've lost sight. And the word of God through the prophet is look back. Look back to your deeper history.

Look back to your roots. Look back to your foundations, to Abraham, to Sarah, to what I would call the long rhythms of grace. Not what's happened to you in the last couple of years.

Look back to the long rhythms of grace, to the lower geological strata, if you think in those kind of terms. The ancient stuff that is truly solid and trustworthy.

Don't get hung up on temporary and current losses. Your old stories of the faithfulness love of love of God can be relied upon, even when all the modern stuff totters and shakes and falls.

Now, we may not literally be in exile, but I think that most of us would accept that as a nation, we have largely forsaken the ways of God.

[31:52] Living faith is no longer central to our national life, to its politics, to its judicial system, to family life, to health provision, to education.

Christian faith in 21st century England is, friends, a minority sport, regarded by many as utterly inconsequential and irrelevant.

That's the reality out there, and it's time we look back to the faithful God who cares and loves and longs to re-establish his kingdom in our land.

Look back to the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were cut. You see, the situation of what was going on here in this land in the 6th, 7th centuries was not unlike what is going on today.

That's why Celtic spirituality is actually quite relevant, because in those days there was a smorgs board of choice. It was a pick-and-mix culture, characterised by ignorance, unbelief, other religions and pagan remedies.

[33:25] Does that sound familiar? Yeah, it does. Looking back to what is deeply rooted in scripture and in the ancient foundations of how God chose to work in our lands might just give us building blocks from which we can fashion a vibrant spiritual future.

In this way, I believe Celtic Christianity could be a vital living vision rather than a fading dream. We might find that going back to the first age of the saints in this land will help us to create a new age of saints in this land.

It could make the difference between helplessly watching a pilgrimage of Goths in present-day Whitby to establishing a redemptive pilgrimage of those seeking to know the living God in these very streets of your town.

That's how real it can be. That's why I wanted to take you back a bit.

I want to talk briefly before I finish. I want to talk about the two particular saints whose names we have used in our community, Aidan and Hilda.

[34:56] Two of the significant founders of Christian faith in the north. Indeed, Aidan was for many the apostle of the English, a humble, grace-filled man who lived the gospel.

He was revered for his gentleness, his humility, his compassion, his generosity, his care for the poor. His name, interestingly, means bright flame.

and you know that bright flame was in his heart. And if you know the statue of Aidan on Holy Island, the bright flame is in his hand, the flame of the gospel of God that he brought, and he would pass on to you.

that life-changing love of God, which resulted within him in a life-changing love for other people.

A remarkable, gentle, gracious man, and for him, the promises of God were indeed yes and amen in Christ Jesus.

[36:15] And I believe that the bright flame of Aidan can inspire our love for God and fuel and fire us to look outwards, to transform existing mission, to reflect the culture-friendly, welcoming, and outreaching hospitality of the Celtic mission.

I believe it can inspire us and fuel us to plant new faith communities, to reach those that existing churches can't reach, to resource and parent ministries which serve the marginalized and the poor, to live a life of simplicity and devotion to God, which is profoundly counter-cultural amidst the rush and the stress and the pressure of materialistic consumerism.

God's love for God. God, there is an example, an earthed example that we can look to in our brother Aidan.

And if we're going to follow in his footsteps, we have to constantly be asking ourselves individually and corporately, how do we do that? How do we earth this kind of vision?

But the other icon is a woman, Hilda. And in these two together, male and female, we see something of the sacred nature of God reflected and revealed.

[38:01] we have evidence of a discipling, soul-friending relationship between Aidan and Hilda.

We have the wonderful example of a woman in leadership. But in Hilda, we have a woman whose name means not bright flame, it means struggle.

I don't know whether there are any Hilders here, but your name means struggle, battler. And you see, this is the other part of the gospel that Paul was talking about in that first chapter of 2 Corinthians, the struggle of the journey of life.

And in my experience, many visions perish because people don't take account of the cost of realizing them. And they run out of gas.

I remember some while ago having spent a long time as a church leader building up a congregation and painting a picture, a vision of what God was wanting to do there.

[39:25] and one dear visiting pastor, a woman who led the church of Yahweh in this country, Valerie, she came to me and she looked me in the eye from under her prayer shawl and she said, Graham, who's going to die

for that?

And she said, who's going to die for that? she could see the enormity of that vision and she knew from her own experience of ministry it wasn't going to happen unless some people were going to lay down their lives for it to happen.

Brothers and sisters, your Hilda, Whitby's Hilda, was one of those. She was a woman who laid down her life for Aidan's glorious gospel of light and love to become real.

This place became an outstanding example throughout the whole country of wisdom, of teaching, of training, of light, of ministry to the poor.

Hilda had character. And I've learned some stuff about character over the years as a leader. I've appointed a lot of leaders in different ministries within churches and I've learned some stuff.

[41:06] I don't know what you've learned about it but I'll tell you this. I have learned that the first thing that we naturally look for is competence. We want people who are going to be good at doing the thing we're asking them to do.

So we look for competence. I've learned that that's not the first thing to look for. Because actually you can learn competence if you're open and willing and we can teach you competence and if in some particular area you don't actually get it, well we can put somebody alongside you who will fill the gap, who will walk with you and will do that.

that's not the end of the world. But I'll tell you what we can't cover for, that's a lack of character.

That's where you stand alone.

That's where stuff gets exposed, where there are fault lines, where there are weaknesses, where there are stress fractures in your life because of sin of your own or sin done to you, stuff that is in your history that you've never sorted out, you've never found healing for, you've never really faced. It comes back to haunt you when the stress is on. Now there's two things here. One is wounded healers.

[42:40] this is one end of the truth. People like Henri Nuon talk a lot about that. The fact that we are all wounded people and we all need healing and we don't wait until we are completely healed before we serve God because we never would.

God picks us up and uses us but it takes a level of humility and a level of honesty and openness to allow God to work in us while we are working with him and for him.

Wounded healers, we can all be that. But the other end of that spectrum and I have fallen on my face with this is hurt people hurt people.

People who are damaged, who've got stuff in their lives that they've not faced and they aren't living daily independent humble relationship with God about spread their pain and their damage all over a ministry.

That's also true. There are only twice in my ministerial life when I've had to remove somebody from ministry and they're some of the most painful things I've ever done.

[44:04] by God the hell. Two people who loved Jesus passionately but who could not face the damage they were doing.

People who were wreaking havoc because of the damage within their own lives. Here in Hilda we look at a woman who had a tough life.

In some ways we can think of her rather aristocratic pedigree and think that it was a life of privilege. Well she grew up without a father because her father was killed away fighting before Hilda was born.

She grew up fatherless. She was taken into the male dominated militaristic court of King Edwin. And that's where she found faith and as a teenager was baptised into Christ. She enjoyed a bit of a time of peace and stability until Edwin who was overlooking all of that and was guardian of that situation was himself killed in battle with his two adult sons and she was bereaved all over again and she had to flee for her life.

[45:40] We hear very little of her for the next 20 years. Whether she resisted marriage and devoted herself to charitable work or was married and then widowed, I think that's actually the more likely story because she's not regarded in the annals of history as a virgin saint, which I think she would be if she had never married.

But we don't know about that bit of her life. What we do know is that in her 30s she decided to choose a life of particular devotion to God to leave her homeland and go via East Anglia to join her sister and become a nun in the monastery at Chelle near Paris.

But just before her departure she received a message from Aidan begging her to return and to help establish the life of monastic prayer and devotion among the English speaking people.

So she gave up her vision to take on somebody else's vision. That's a sign of grace. I don't know whether you've done that whether you've stepped in behind somebody else in order to uphold the God thing that he's doing in them and through them.

Keeps you humble. Remember Elisha following in the steps of Elijah. We look at that little bit in the story where Elijah goes and puts his cloak on Elisha and there is the calling and then we hear next to nothing and what it says the only bit it says about Elisha is he washed the hands of the prophet. [47:39] In other words he made the tea and he scrubbed out the home and he cooked the meals and he made the bed and he did the garden and well it doesn't tell you but if you sit and work out the time schedule of that story he did that for at least 14 years because you can tell that from who was king and for how long they were king and in the reign of whatever 14 years of hiding in the shadow of the big man of God learning humility learning the trade out of sight out of mind that's character forming seriously character forming sometimes we're too quick to put people into positions of prominence because God hasn't had time to do the real stuff in them the stuff that God was doing in Hilda

Aidan called her she went to a tiny plot of land on the north bank of the river weir and spent a year there in her novitiate and then Aidan calls her to become the second abbess of the emerging monastery at Hartlepool!

Here she grows in leadership in wisdom in love of God she nurtures many and becomes affectionately known as mother nine years of that until King Oswu asks her to establish or commands her I'm not quite sure how it worked to establish the monastery here on the headland at Whitby and here because of what God had done in her she begins to build something quite remarkable because here is a woman with profound leadership gifts which come right through from the depth of what God has taught her through the struggles and the hard times of her life and she can speak with authority and she can speak with compassion and she trained so many priests we have no idea how many she trained six bishops here in Whitby now this is a woman we're talking about in the 600s see the

Celts didn't have a problem with gender that was something that was inherited later on from the Roman church but she established a centre of learning and a centre of mission and she had to handle difficult people I mean Bishop Wilfred if you read the stuff about him he was very ambitious he was a man after power and glory he was not easy to handle Hilda had to handle him Hilda's monastery here was chosen to be the place for the Synod of Whitby in 664 why well because Hilda was a wise woman who could be trusted with this incredibly delicate matter that needed to be resolved Hilda had come to faith back under the

Roman mission she'd been baptized in York under the ministry of Paul Inus who would come originally from Rome and you never lose your love of the place and the people who bring you to faith in Christ!

[51:49] And yet she had come to take on through Aidan and the Irish mission the beauty and the sensitivity and the sense of God that characterized that outpouring of love she had to handle that she had to graciously and wisely manage the aftermath of Whitby and the decisions that were made to fall in line with the Roman way of doing things Bede the historian is clear that her inclinations were on the Irish side but no she was a loyal servant and she enacted as graciously and carefully as she could the decisions that were made have you ever had to do that to live some stuff to enact some stuff that you wish wasn't the case but actually it has to be that takes grace doesn't it takes humility the final six years of Hilda's life were dominated by a painful and debilitating illness and yet says Bede she continued to lead her community setting an example of faithful worship and thanksgiving in her

suffering even overseeing the establishment of another monastic community at Hackness during the very final year of her life what a remarkable woman it was no easy life pioneering women's leadership amongst both personal difficulties and challenging times you know

I think Hilda could have written those first few words of 2 Corinthians chapter 1 I do not want you to be uninformed about the hardships we suffered we were under great pressure far beyond our ability to endure indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death but this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves but upon the living God God is great and all the promises of God are yes and are men in Christ but Paul's spirituality was not naively triumphalistic and neither was Hilda's it was real it was robust Jesus following discipline sacrificial cross bearing discipleship that's what it was tough discipleship

St. Paul of course goes on in chapter 4 to say we have this treasure in jars of clay so that it might be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us we are afflicted in every way but not crushed says the apostle perplexed but not driven to despair persecuted but not forsaken struck down but not destroyed Hilda knew that Hilda lived that she modelled that and so she tells us today here all these years later that we can live a life that is deeply influential while we are still struggling while we are not fully healed while everything is not going hunky dory we can live that life of discipleship in the power of the

Holy Spirit Hilda's life tells us that anything as profoundly worthwhile and life changing as building a colony of heaven on earth will be fraught with toil and sweat and pain and struggle that's not because it's going wrong that's not because God has deserted us that's just because that's how it is it's going to be really worthwhile if you're going to establish the kingdom of God it's going to be hard Hilda tells us that we can only sustain such a vibrant and godly life and ministry in brackets for the long haul through a daily discipline of worship and prayer and sacrificial service it doesn't happen on the cheap it doesn't happen by turning up to occasional

Sunday services it only happens through the disciplined spiritual life that's where we avail ourselves of the God perspective again and again and again I mean how many times a week do you eat I'm serious here really serious I mean on average three times a day seven threes if you want your spiritual blood sugar to be in good shape then you better be praying that many times brothers and sisters because just as your human physical blood sugar will go down if you don't eat two three four times a day so will your spiritual blood sugar level render you inoperative effectively if you are not stopping to pause to worship to receive the grace the enabling the strengthening of

[58:28] God that's why a discipline of prayer is so so crucial so my questions to you at the end would be do you really really really want to re-dig these wells do you really want to follow in these footsteps!

do really want to follow in these footsteps! I've tried to be honest it's glorious it's the fullness of the gospel of God but I can't give you the prescription for the pain-free journey will you take up your Celtic cross and follow that's the challenge I think that God gives to us today and that's what I wanted to say before we talk about the specifics of what Hilda did and what the wells actually are you see the important stuff is the character and the faithfulness and the glory of God those are the two things that really matter who God is and who you are becoming the rest will look after itself to be honest because it will emerge out of those two things and I speak to you as one who is struggling to walk that way so help me God may it be that real may it be a life that is found to give honour to

God in the midst of whatever the world throws my way may that be true for you too God bless you thank you brother for that vision laid out clearly before us the vision and the struggle the light and the flame and the struggle I never knew that Hilda meant struggle or that Jesus came to save the cosmos either it was an amazing revelation so before we close we sing the splendour of the king as In majesty, his lawyers of joy, lawyers of joy. He may ask himself in life, when darkness tries to rise, tremble to his voice, tremble to his voice.

How great his love, sing with me how great his love, hold him afraid, how great his love.

[62:46] Days too late she'd stand, time is in his hands, beginning and the end, beginning and the end.

The gospel is free and far, the God of spirit said, the lion and the lamb, the lion and the lamb.

How great his love, sing with me how great his love, hold him afraid, how great his love.

Name above all names, and the of all praise, and the of all praise, and the of all praise.

And my heart will sing, how great his love. Name above all names, and the of all praise, and my heart will sing, how great his love.

[64:21] How great his love, sing with me how great his love. How great his love, sing with me how great his love.

Thanks Lord. Amen. Now Lord, may we remember that we go out with the flame, the flame of your love in our hearts, and prepare us for the struggle, we pray.

Remind us Lord, that we will be victorious. In your name. Amen. A fairly traded tea and coffee will be available at the back, but for those who God has spoken to today, the prayer team will all be here at the back, if you want to seek counsel with them, and prayer with them.

Amen. Thank you.