



Sermon by the Right Reverend John R. Stephens
St. Chad's Final Liturgy at this building
76 Years of Ministry
Ascension 2022

St. Chad, as many of you might know was an Anglo-Saxon Bishop who died in the year 672. Chad grew up in a Christian home and he and three of his brothers entered the monastic life on the island of Lindisfarne which was central to his formation as an ordained person and eventually as a bishop.

I want to pause for a moment and reflect a little bit on his connection to Lindisfarne. I have been to Lindisfarne, often known simply as Holy Island, for I made a pilgrimage out to this island several years ago. And it had a great impact on my own spiritual life. It is just off the coast of Northern England, clearly visible from the shore, but somehow it also invites as a destination, one is drawn to it. It sits in easy eyesight, but it seems more than that, you want to know more and discover more. Hard to fully explain but to get there one needs to go at low tide. Pilgrims go out to the island by walking across the sands revealed by the

retreating waters. When I walked out to Lindisfarne, it was a beautiful day, the sun was shining and glistening off the tide pools in the early morning light. The way is marked with poles erected in the sand to ensure safe passage, but it would be hard to get lost. While there is now also a road to reach the island, when one walks on the sand, there is much more of a sense of intention of reaching a destination and perhaps even a goal. There is purpose and forethought, it is slowing down and prayerful and reflective. It is pilgrimage and seeking what is holy in this life. It is a wonderful experience.

It is a path that has been walked by thousands of pilgrims over hundreds of years, Chad being but one. Many have gone to be on the grounds of the monastery founded by St. Aidan but where St. Cuthbert was also an abbot. A beautiful set of the gospels was created here, known as the Lindisfarne Gospels, which portray our hope and trust in Christ's words and the kingdom of heaven. It was a central place of transformation and evangelism and had a huge influence on the Celtic Church, the Church of England and presumably the Christian Church in many parts of the world, for even here we have been influenced by it.

Chad was a person of deep and devout faith with a strong disposition to spreading the good news of Christ. Perhaps his time at Lindisfarne and the emphasis on pilgrimage, a centre of Church renewal, and a place of encounter with holiness and wonder influenced his life in ways beyond measure, as it has for so many pilgrims ever since.

For naming this community, this parish, in honour of your patron, St. Chad, I think has even influenced this parish more than one might consider. It has been a community that has

sought to spread the gospel in areas far beyond the bounds of the parish. So much good ministry has taken place here since 1947. In the 75 years, so many people have encountered the love and hope of Jesus Christ. So many have discovered the working of the Trinity of God in their lives. So many have come to know the calling of loving God and loving our neighbour as ourselves. Sunday school, youth groups, men's groups, women's groups, Bible studies, church bazaars, Christmas liturgies, Easter liturgies, all about the hope that we know in our faith in Jesus Christ. The Chinese language ministry, as well, has for so many years been a place of gathering and teaching that has influenced many, particularly of Asian descent but not limited to that. This has been a place of holy encounter much like Lindisfarne itself.

Today in the Church's calendar we are celebrating the Day of Ascension. The reading from the Book of Acts described the scene where Jesus gathered with the eleven disciples at this point. He gathers with them and soon disappears from their sight. It seemed like some of them thought that this would be the end of any encounter that they might ever have with Jesus again. When Jesus disappeared perhaps some wondered if all else disappeared as well. Oh how wrong they were.

For even as they are left gazing up to the skies as Jesus left their sight, two people dressed in white were suddenly in their midst. They wondered why the eleven were simply staying put. And they said to them: "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." What I hear in this, is stop staring into the sky and get on with ministry. Get on

with seeking the presence of Jesus in the world all around. He may have disappeared from your physical sight but certainly not your spiritual sight.

While the eleven were thinking all was ending, in actual fact it was more like that image that Michelangelo was trying to capture when God was pointing and the first person, often known as Adam, was reaching and their fingertips are just about to connect. An invitation, a calling, to live into the holiness and wonder and beauty of life. That kind of moment on that Day of Ascension.

And we know that same feeling. For we know the presence of Christ in our gathering this evening, in the breaking of bread, in the prayers, in our neighbour, in our fellowship, in our hope for the future.

In the gospel passage for this evening, Jesus phrased it this way: "See I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." The parish of St. Chad's has been clothed with this power, the power of the Holy Spirit for all the years of its ministry. And even as we prepare for the conclusion of St. Chad's ministry here in the Arbutus area, we know that the same Holy Spirit is inviting a new ministry to form and develop. A ministry focused on some of the things that guided St. Chad and now will guide towards the future. A ministry based on Chinese language and to continue to spread the gospel and build up the church but in new ways. There is resurrection and not simply death. There is ascension but also a new calling.

As we look to the future this evening, we also look to the past. We give thanks for all of the past clergy who, like Chad were called to ordained ministry and part of that calling was to have served here; for their gifts and talents, their commitment to living out the Holy Spirit's calling, their dedication to preaching and praying and living the good news. But it is certainly much more than the work of the clergy that we are honouring today. We remember all others called to ministry: the wardens, the treasurers, the trustees, the parish councils that have sought to discern new paths over the years. We remember the Sunday School teachers and students, youth groups and youth group leaders. We remember those who gave so much of their time and treasure and talent as stewards giving back to God what God placed in their lives. We are grateful and thankful to all of these people.

We gather with this great cloud of witnesses with us. We gather with the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the resurrected and ascended Christ, and the Creator. We gather with those who are present this evening, saddened that ministry here is drawing to a conclusion but hopeful to see what God is calling us to now.

We live in a world and a city of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland very different than in 1945. We live in a time where many people are seeking a deeper spirituality in their lives but are not quite sure where to turn. We live in a time where fewer people attend church but still seek comfort and rest for their soul. The new St. Chad's, or the continuing ministry of St. Chad's will seek to speak to the world of this time and place. To offer a newly planted ministry which will aim to attract those who are not sure where to begin on their spiritual

journey. To offer in different ways the deep and continuing faith and tradition of the Anglican Church but with a fresh expression.

We pray that the Holy Spirit that was promised by the two dressed in white at the Ascension of Jesus, and the promises of Jesus himself, will continue to descend upon all of us and fill us with the new wine of new possibility and new direction. We pray that the Holy Spirit which called St. Chad to come closer to the Island of Lindisfarne and throughout his life may continue to lead and invite. We pray that this same Spirit continue to bless all those gathered here tonight and the new ministry that will soon be forming, that continues to look to St. Chad as a patron and guide.