

Brancepeth sermon
17 May 2026

Acts 1.6-14

John 17.1-11

Psalm 68.1-10, 32-end

May I speak in the name of God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

Amen.

I want this morning to speak about three very different voyages,
three long journeys that have been undertaken
or that *are* being undertaken
by followers of Jesus.

And the first of these voyages is the one
undertaken by our patronal saint, Saint Brandon,

and it's appropriate to talk about it today
given that yesterday was his feast day.

St Brandon was an Irish monk, who is also known as St Brendan,
and he is called Brendan the Navigator, or Brendan the Voyager,
because a story came to be told of
his undertaking of great sea journey.

He lived at the turn from the fifth to the sixth century after Christ,
and the story of his voyage, as it is told in medieval sources,
begins this way:

‘Saint Brandon, the son of Findlug,
great-grandson of Atla of the line of Eogen,
was born in the marshy region of Munster.’

One day, a kinsman came to see him,
a man called Barinthus, who was also a monk,
and he told Brandon that he had found a place called
the Island of Delights,
and beyond that the Land-of-Promise of the Saints,
a land where there is no need for food or drink

no need for sleep;

a land where there is no obscuring darkness but only perpetual day.

And having heard this tale from his kinsman, Brandon conceived
an overwhelming desire to see this land for himself,
and he determined to set out in quest of it.

Taking fourteen of his monks with him as companions,
he then voyaged for seven years,
experiencing many hardships and many adventures,
including inadvertently landing on and setting up camp on
the back of a whale
and at one point, bumping rather unexpectedly into Judas Iscariot.

But after seven long and eventful years,
he and his companions found the Land of Promise of the Saints,
and it was everything they had heard it would be.

They stayed there only briefly, getting a taste of its wonders
but they discovered that, as Barinthus had said
it was a land in which there was no night,
no twilight or darkness,
because it was a land bathed in the light of Christ.

Having experienced all this for themselves,
Brandon and his companions embarked on their return voyage,
and we are told that
‘Brandon’s community was rapturous with joy at his return,
and glorified God for His kindness in
letting them once more enjoy the sight of their father
from whom they had been separated so long.
St Brandon returned their affection and
recounted everything he remembered of the voyage
and all the wonders God had deigned to show him.’

Now, the story of Brandon’s fantastical voyage is told
as a story in which his companions
continually learned and grew in their faith;
it is in fact a story very like that of the
Voyage of the Dawn Treader,
for those of you who know your Chronicles of Narnia:
on each island that they visited,
there were things to learn, dangers to recognise,
forms of faithfulness and courage to practice.

It is clearly, at least to an extent, a story told to teach its readers
what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus –
to face all kinds of trials and temptations,
all kinds of opportunities to turn aside or to give up
but instead to *keep on keeping on*,
in the hope of reaching one day the promised land
the land of light perpetual,
the land of the light of Christ.

So that's the first voyage I want you to have in mind,
the voyage of Brandon and his companions,
a voyage of continual learning, leading into the light.

The second voyage, however,
is the journey of the first disciples of Jesus.
And this is a voyage that,
though it did occasionally involve travelling in boats,
largely took place on foot, in Galilee and Judaea,
that is, over an area about the size of Wales.

It is a story of a group of men and women
who have decided to leave behind their homes,

and leave behind their families,
in order to tag along with this strange and demanding
healer, exorcist and teacher called Jesus.
Most of them were probably from very poor,
financially and socially precarious backgrounds,
the sort of people like those in Jesus' parables,
who would hang around in the village square
hoping to be taken on as day labourers in the fields;
the sort of people where the loss and rediscovery of a single coin
might make all the difference to their lives.

But the companions on this voyage have
left all of that life behind them,
in order to go off on the road with Jesus.
They don't seem to have had horses or even donkeys with them
(you may remember, after all, that they need to borrow one
when Jesus wants to ride into Jerusalem),
so as far as we can tell they walked pretty much everywhere.

But when we meet them in our reading from Acts today,
they *seem* to have reached the end of the road.

Jesus has risen from the dead, and come back to them,
and they've had the chance to spend a bit more time with him
but now he has been taken from their sight
he's off and away up to heaven,
and they have been left here alone.

It seems that this is the end of their travelling,
and that all that is left to do is to wait, and wait
for some distant day on which he will return.

But the whole point of the Book of Acts is to tell us
that their voyage was not, in fact, over –
to show us that these companions of Jesus,
who had walked with him on the road,
still had more of a journey to take
a voyage of ongoing learning, ongoing discovery
of how they were going to live as followers of Jesus,
how they were going to live as his witnesses,
how they were going to *keep on keeping on*
even when facing trials and temptations of every kind.

They are, you might say, just like the monks of St Brandon,
on a voyage that leads into the light of Christ,
the light perpetual, the light that never dims –
but this is not for them a literal light,
an island where the sun never sets;
it is a light that comes to shine in and through *them*,
in and through their lives,
in and through their speech,
in and through their love for one another.

After all, in our Gospel reading, we heard Jesus' prayer
offered on the night when he was betrayed,
the night when his voyage was about to take him
away from the world through which he had been
walking with his disciples –
and he says, 'I am no longer in the world,
but *they* are in the world' –
that is, my disciples are still on the road,
still in the midst of their journey.

And then he says, 'I have been glorified in them'
That is: Jesus says that his light has become visible in them,
in his disciples;
his light is shining in them and through them,
so that their lives, their love for one another, their following of him
tells the world about Jesus,
shows the world the light of Jesus.
Theirs is not a voyage towards a distant light,
but a voyage on which they are carrying the light within themselves.

And here's something I want you to notice about this story.
The disciples about whom Jesus says this,
the disciples who are voyaging in the light of Christ,
the disciples whose lives are displaying his glory –
well – they are a rather random bunch.
The gospels present them as very ordinary,
as scared, as mistaken, as argumentative;
as people of whom Jesus can regularly say, 'Oh you of little faith!',
a ragtag bunch of travellers – a motley crew.

They are really not especially impressive.

But it is of that unimpressive bunch of travellers that Jesus says

‘I *have been* glorified in them’

Not ‘I will be, one day, when they’ve got their act together’, but

‘I *have been*’.

Even in their muddled and inconstant following,

in their scared and uncomprehending following,

in their argumentative and unimpressive following

Jesus *has* been glorified; his light *has* shone through them

not because they’re special,

not because they’ve arrived at their destination,

but simply because they are on this journey with him;

simply because they come back even when they have run away,

simply because they keep on asking ‘What then shall we do?’,

even when they miss the point of what he tells them,

or are not ready to put what they hear into practice.

He *has* been glorified in them, his light *is* shining in them

simply because they are sheep who know the voice of their shepherd,

and they head towards it, even when they have wandered off.

They are on a journey, they are on a voyage,
in company with Jesus,
and they witness to him as *they keep on keeping on*,
as they keep on journeying,
keep on voyaging, in his company.

And that brings me to the third voyage I want to mention.

Which is the one that involves all of *us*.

Because I want to suggest that Jesus says of all of us, too,

‘I have been glorified in them!

My light shines in them!

These are my witnesses, my heralds, my companions!’

Not because we are somehow hugely impressive,

not because of anything we have achieved,

not because we know all or indeed any of the answers,

and *not, certainly not*, because we are particularly holy.

We are, after all, no better than those first disciples;

we’re as inconstant, as dim-witted, as capable of misunderstanding.

We are, frankly, just as embarrassing as them

if you look at us closely.

But we are on a journey with Jesus,

we're on a voyage

our very own voyage of the Dawn Treader –

our very own voyage to the Promised Land of the Saints,

our very own voyage into light.

And we witness to Jesus, we glorify Jesus,

we display the light of Jesus,

as we go on *learning*,

as we go on coming back to him, even when we have strayed,

as we go on asking 'What then should we do?',

and as we keep on listening together for the answers;

as we *keep on keeping on*

our little boat of a church afloat on a wide, wide sea,

looking out for where Jesus might take us next.

And our voyage together is far from over.

Amen.