



Loops and coils of rope lay drying on a Northumbrian Quay, ready for the next voyage of the lobster fishermen. It looks haphazard, but when the pots are laid, meticulous attention to detail ensures that there is a smooth flow of pots over the side or they will never be able to retrieve them.

Like the disciples of Jesus these men know what they are doing when it comes to fishing – they know the sea, the winds, the seabird signs and the sky colours.

And like the disciples of Jesus it was the fishermen and sailors of Northumbria who spread the Good News of God's love along the coast of England. Seafaring Irish monks from Iona had brought that good news to them, had created monasteries, left teachers and priests to build the Kingdom of God – not just there – but as far as they could travel. It was Cedd who in the seventh century sailed from Northumbria to Bradwell, Essex, to tell the story of Jesus, to establish his monastery at Othona and leave the iconic St Peter' church as a beacon to seafarers and landmen alike.

They planned their voyages, they read the signs of the weather, they knew the tides and the vagaries of the sea, they were prepared. And yet the whole venture was a step into the unknown, into hostile territories, peopled by warring tribes whose gods were fierce and unrelentingly bloodthirsty. Yet still they went, knowing for themselves the difference their faith had made to them, graciously wishing to share the peace and strength of God's love, offering an eternal salvation.

Saint Bede, writing in the tenth century described life as like that of a sparrow flying through the mead-hall – coming from darkness into the warmth and joyousness of the feasting and then out into the darkness again. But Bede like, all those Northumbrian sailing saints, knew that for those who accepted the Christian Faith there was a promise of eternal life in God's presence once through the mead-hall of this life. It was this certainty that made them take to their frail boats to spread the story of Jesus. And in each generation from the first century until today, people have prepared themselves to take the word of God with them to bring freedom and light to the world. Thank God.

Prayer of St Brendan the navigator

*“Help me to journey beyond the familiar  
and into the unknown.*

*Give me the faith to leave old ways  
and break fresh ground with You.*

*Christ of the mysteries, I trust You  
to be stronger than each storm within me.*

*I will trust in the darkness and know  
that my times, even now, are in Your hand.*

*Tune my spirit to the music of heaven,  
and somehow, make my obedience count for You.”*

AMEN.

St Brendan, an Irish monk who, in the sixth century, travelled widely by boat from Ireland to Scotland and as far as the Hebrides, as well as Wales and England. He is also the hero of the Voyage of St Brendan during which he reached the promised land of the saints somewhere in the Atlantic.