

A VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE

LINDISFARNE

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Ordinary Pilgrim

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HOW TO MAKE A VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE



Pilgrimage is such an embodied practice, maybe it is hard to imagine how you might make a "virtual" pilgrimage? But our imaginations are rich spaces, and our souls contain vast landscapes. There is possibility, then, to journey to a thin place without ever setting physical foot there.

This guide is for those for whom a trip to Lindisfarne is not possible because of health, finances, distance or life responsibilities.

You may like to set aside a chunk of time and work through the whole pilgrimage in one go. Or you may decide to take it a bit at a time, maybe one location each day, and use that day to imagine yourself there and reflect on the questions.

If you are able to, you may like to walk in your local area. The Lindisfarne loop is about 8-9km. Perhaps there's a similar length walk near you that you could take, pausing regularly to read the prompts.

However you engage with it, I hope this offering sparks your imagination, and allows you to recognise the holy ground you are on.





HOLY ISLAND

This is a map of the island. The sandbanks to the west are frequently covered by the incoming tides, but you are likely to spot (and definitely hear!) seals and birds there. The green pins mark the places I invite us to stop on our virtual journey.

Maps help us orient ourselves to our surroundings and our place in them. How are you oriented to your surroundings right now? How could you shift your posture – inner and outer – in a way that helps you feel ready to begin this virtual pilgrimage?

CROSSING OVER



Pilgrims arrive in various ways on Lindisfarne – by foot, bike, car or bus. But all must wait for the tide to recede.

There is no rushing this arrival. In this waiting, we recognise ourselves deeply connected to the rhythms of our world – the daily movements of the sea that are themselves linked to the orbiting cycles of the moon.

Take a moment to pause before you cross over into this virtual pilgrimage. Pay attention to your own inner rhythms – put a hand over your chest to feel it rising and falling with each breath; seek out your pulse and listen to its beating the lifeblood through your body.

In what ways are you right now connected to the larger rhythms of the natural world? What might it look like to enter into that sacred rhythm on this pilgrimage?

"It is wise in your own life to be able to recognise and acknowledge the key thresholds; to take your time; to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there; to listen inward with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward. The time has come to cross."

— John O'Donohue



Pilgrims on foot have traditionally crossed over the sands at low tide, along the route marked by wooden poles. Even at low tide, the way is wet. Your feet sink into sand and mud with each step, and you would be wise to bring your pilgrims staff with you to keep your balance.

This is the moment to set your intentions, as you cross over from the mainland to this holy island.

What do you long for? What do you need? What do you carry with you? What are you leaving behind?

It's traditional for pilgrims to circle their destination before entering in. We're going to take that idea bigger as we arrive on the island, by making a clockwise walk around the edge of the island.

We turn north and cross over a field which quickly becomes the start of the dunes, known as The Links. You are entering a nature reserve which together with the salt flats and mudflats north and west of Holy Island covers 35,000 hectares.

This ever-changing landscape has been moulded by wind and water to create a unique habitat for wildlife, including some that are rare: the ringed plover, the wintering brent geese, and the Lindisfarne helleborine orchid, which is only found here.

This part of the island is often much quieter than the rest. Tourists and day trippers tend to drive onto the island and head straight to the Abbey and Castle on the south of the island.

What is meaningful about circling a pilgrim destination before entering? What questions, ideas or images are you circling around on your inner pilgrimage?

THE LINKS

A top-down photograph of a person's feet wearing brown leather hiking boots with dark laces and blue denim jeans with the cuffs rolled up. The person is standing on a sandy surface with distinct, wavy ripples. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

**CIRCLE US LORD,
KEEP LOVE WITHIN, KEEP HATRED OUT.
KEEP JOY WITHIN, KEEP FEAR OUT.
KEEP PEACE WITHIN, KEEP WORRY OUT.
KEEP LIGHT WITHIN, KEEP DARKNESS OUT.
MAY YOU STAND IN THE CIRCLE WITH US,
TODAY AND ALWAYS.**

St Cuthbert's Caim (Circle prayer)

WILD EDGES



"Edge walkers occupy a thin space and are by definition a bit lonely. Most people inhabit the vast spaces on both sides of edges. But those of us called to the thresholds - the edges between - live in this thin space and recognise one another when we meet. The edges between biosystems are called *ecotones*. These thresholds usually contain the most biodiversity and therefore are the most resilient... There have always been edge walkers... and at that edge, spirituality and nature are in unbroken relationship."

- Victoria Loorz, *Church of the Wild*

What are the edges you are walking in your spiritual life?

Who are your fellow pilgrims as you walk those wild edges and how do you recognise them?

What do you see as the gifts of your own ecotone? What spiritual biodiversity or resilience you can receive?



THE BEACH

Climbing up and over the last dunes, you see stretched out before you the biggest beach on Lindisfarne. It is fine white sand, flat and wide.

There is a vast spaciousness here, that calls to mind Psalm 18:

**"God brought me out into a spacious place;
God rescued me because They delighted in me."**

As you imagine standing upon these wide beaches, how does your body respond? What do you hear, smell, feel, taste? What shifts within you - physically and emotionally - to find yourself in a spacious place?

Where do you need or desire more spaciousness in your own life?



A Prayer for Spaciousness, by Aundi Kolber

O God, would you give us the spaciousness to unfurl into the people you have created us to be.

May we find that we can exhale long and deep into the reality of our Belovedness.

May we open up in the presence of the One who holds and knows all things.

May the *Imago Dei* inside each and every one of us come alive in light of your goodness.

May we have the resources and support to continue in our becoming.

Would you remind us, that in the midst of our becoming—you love us and walk beside us?

Would you remind us that in the darkest shadow and the deepest valley you are there?

Would you help us to know that in the glints of light that come in the morning—you too, are there?



HEADLANDS AND COVES

As you continue to walk south east along the coast line, you'll move over a number of rocky headlands, and cross more sandy coves nestled between the rocks.

They have names like Back Skerrs, Snipe Point, Coves Haven, Castlehead Rocks, Keel Head and Emmanuel Head. Some of those make sense to us, some are linked to older stories and languages that have been lost to us.

Naming is important. It creates meaning and belonging. And often the best names are not bestowed but revealed.

If you consider your spiritual journey as a landscape, how might you name the coves and headlands you are now wandering over?



As you turn and walk south now, with the Castle clearly in your sights, you have the chance to make a detour inland, to a surprising space. This is the garden of Gertrude Jekyll, created in 1911 for a friend who'd bought the castle as a holiday home. On this rather windswept patch of earth, this is a place of stillness, of shelter, and of colour (even in late October when I visited).

This is also one of the few places that a woman holds centre stage on the island. No doubt women lived meaningful lives here, but they are rarely mentioned or named as you do the official tours, read the plaques, look at the statues.

What then might it mean that a woman created in this place a garden?

What aspects of the feminine are most present and cherished in your own character and personality?

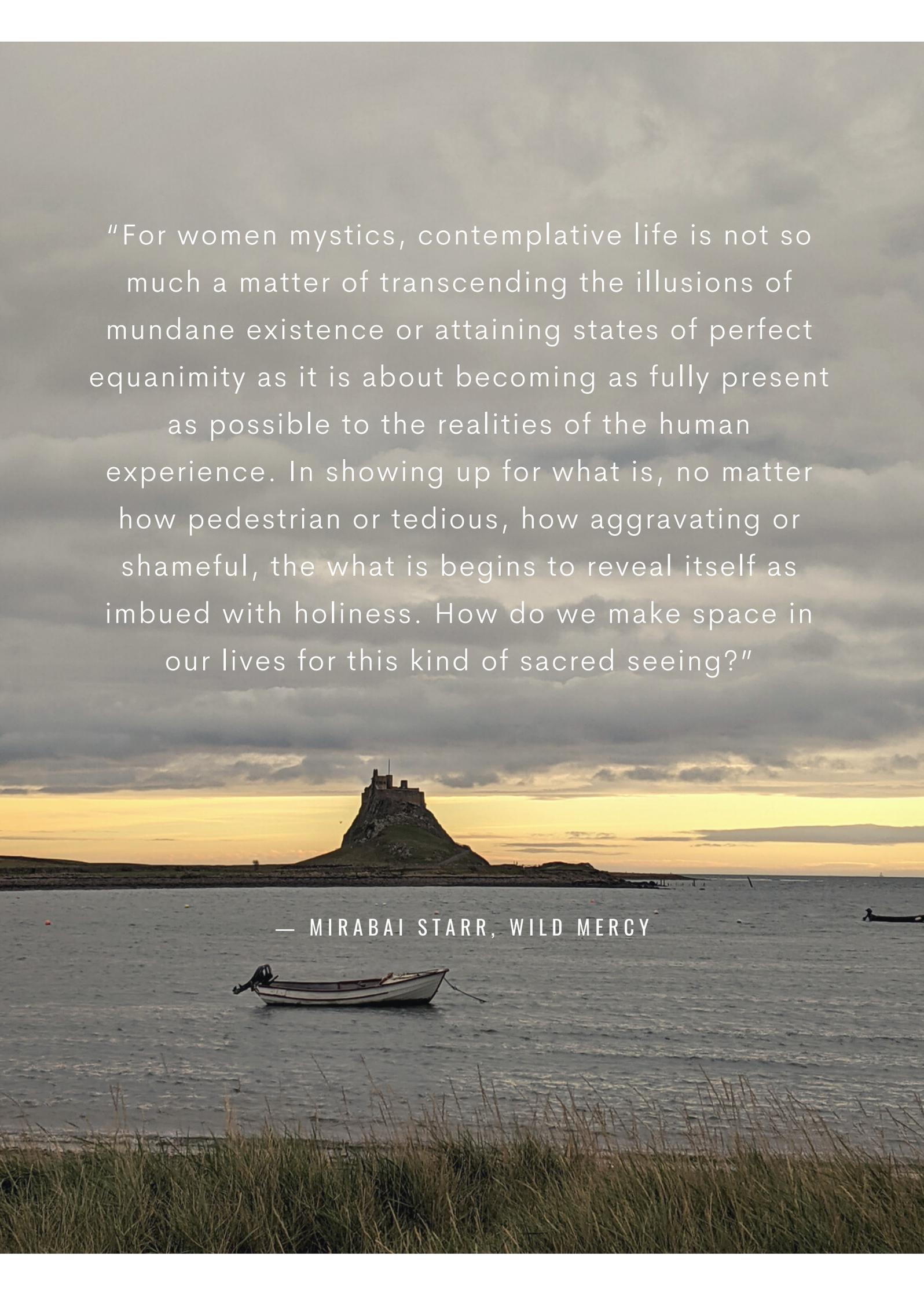
If you were imagine your life as a garden, what seeds are you sowing, what plants are you tending, that will bring colour and nourishment and refuge to others?

In what ways do you need to first receive those gifts for yourself?



"For women mystics, contemplative life is not so much a matter of transcending the illusions of mundane existence or attaining states of perfect equanimity as it is about becoming as fully present as possible to the realities of the human experience. In showing up for what is, no matter how pedestrian or tedious, how aggravating or shameful, the what is begins to reveal itself as imbued with holiness. How do we make space in our lives for this kind of sacred seeing?"

— MIRABAI STARR, WILD MERCY



THE CASTLE



The Castle, together with the Abbey, is the key attraction on the island, so while you may have been mostly alone while walking around the north of the island, now you encounter the day-trippers and tourists. I don't write that disparagingly; There is space for us all, but it may require a different posture.



To enter the castle, you walk up a steep, patterned cobbled path with steps, and then there are further winding staircases inside that bring you up and up eventually to the rooftop terrace, and a view over the whole island and the sea and mainland beyond.

In what ways are you in need of a new perspective?

Imagine looking out with a birds-eye view over your life. What do you see differently from up here?

Genesis 1 says that God's Spirit hovered over the dark wildness of the world, before She spoke it into being.

As you hover over your own life, what needs to be spoken into being?



There's another tidal island to visit on this pilgrimage: St Cuthbert's Island, also called Hobthrush Island (a hobthrush is a small goblin that would help with household chores!).

This small island lies in between Lindisfarne and the Mainland, and the time available to cross over to it at low tide is very short. This is where St Cuthbert is said to have regularly retreated alone to pray in solitude.

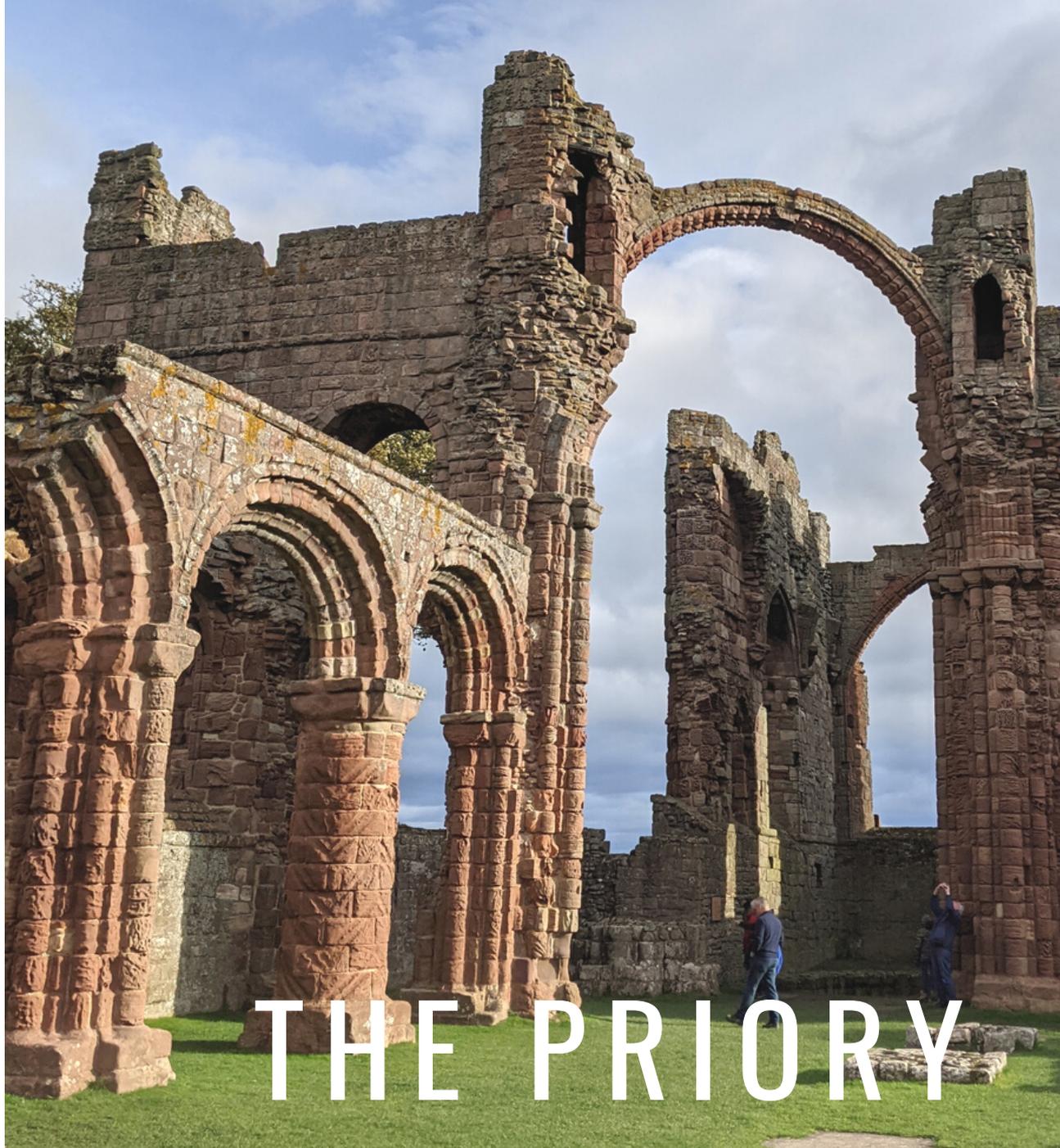
Stories tell of how Cuthbert used to pray by walking into the cold water and standing up to his chest, his arms outstretched, sometimes for the whole night. One morning one of the monks watched him come up out of the water, accompanied by two otters, who stayed close to him to dry and warm him with their bodies.

What is the invitation into solitude for you?

And how might you be met in surprising ways by sacred community?

ST CUTHBERT'S ISLAND





We have circled the island and now you arrive at its heart – the Priory.

The Irish monk Aidan, from Iona, was summoned by King Oswald to establish a monastic community here in 635 AD, and from here travelling monks brought the gospel to Northumbria and beyond. The community later fled after the violent Viking attack in AD 793. The ruins you see remain from the 12th Century, when a monastic community was re-established in more peaceful times.

Not much remains of the buildings that once made up this monastic community that had such a big impact of the religion and culture of the British Isles and beyond. But these walls heard many prayers and conversations, and perhaps the stones hold them still.

Imagine touching the stones – put your hands or forehead against them or lean back into them and let them take your weight. What are the prayers that need a secure holding place? What might it mean to add your prayers to those spoken here over many centuries?



SACRED COMMUNITY

Much of the day now, the priory lies quiet and empty – locked during closing hours when the tide is high. Take a moment to imagine it as the busy and creative place it would have been as a monastic community, still with that quiet grounded heart in the daily cycle of prayers, but surrounded with activity and community.

This was a place of prayer, of service and of creativity – the beautiful illuminated Lindisfarne Gospels were created here, young people studied and were apprenticed, and the local community was served.

How do your practices and rhythms of prayer inform your service and creativity?

Who are you in sacred community with? How does their presence in your life encourage and inspire the unique outworking of your own faith?



THE CHURCH

St Mary's church is actually the oldest building on the island, older even than the remains of the Priory we have just visited, dating to 1180 and 1300.



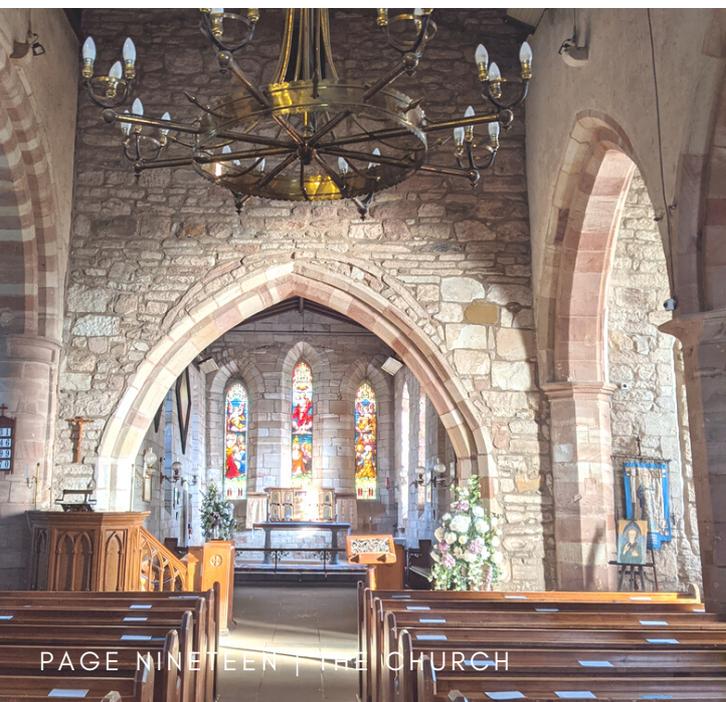
One one side of the church is the life-size sculpture, "The Journey", carved out of elm by Fenwick Lawson. It portrays six Lindisfarne monks carrying the body of Cuthbert after they left the island in 875.

Whereas today this is the final destination for many pilgrims, theirs was one of many journeys that began on this island and stretched across the British Isles and beyond.

Your pilgrimage has a return journey, like the walking out of a prayer labyrinth. That return gives you time to reflect and integrate all you have received back into your daily life.

What are the gifts you carry with you from this particular pilgrimage?

You set your intention as you began this pilgrimage; what intention will you now set for your return to daily life?





A pilgrimage is a ritual journey with a hallowed purpose. Every step along the way has meaning. The pilgrim knows that life giving challenges will emerge. A pilgrimage is not a vacation; it is a transformational journey during which significant change takes place. New insights are given. Deeper understanding is attained. New and old places in the heart are visited. Blessings are received and healing takes place. On return from the pilgrimage, life is seen with different eyes. Nothing will ever be quite the same again.

- Macrina Wiederkehr,
Behold Your Life



We are completing our circle, by walking along the west coast back to the tidal causeway.

Most visitors take the main road back to the car park, but we will walk along the narrow rocky beach. Here the low cliffs are eroded by the powerful tides, the smell of seaweed fills your nostrils, and the sound of seals barking on the sandflats accompanies your slow and steady walk across the stones.

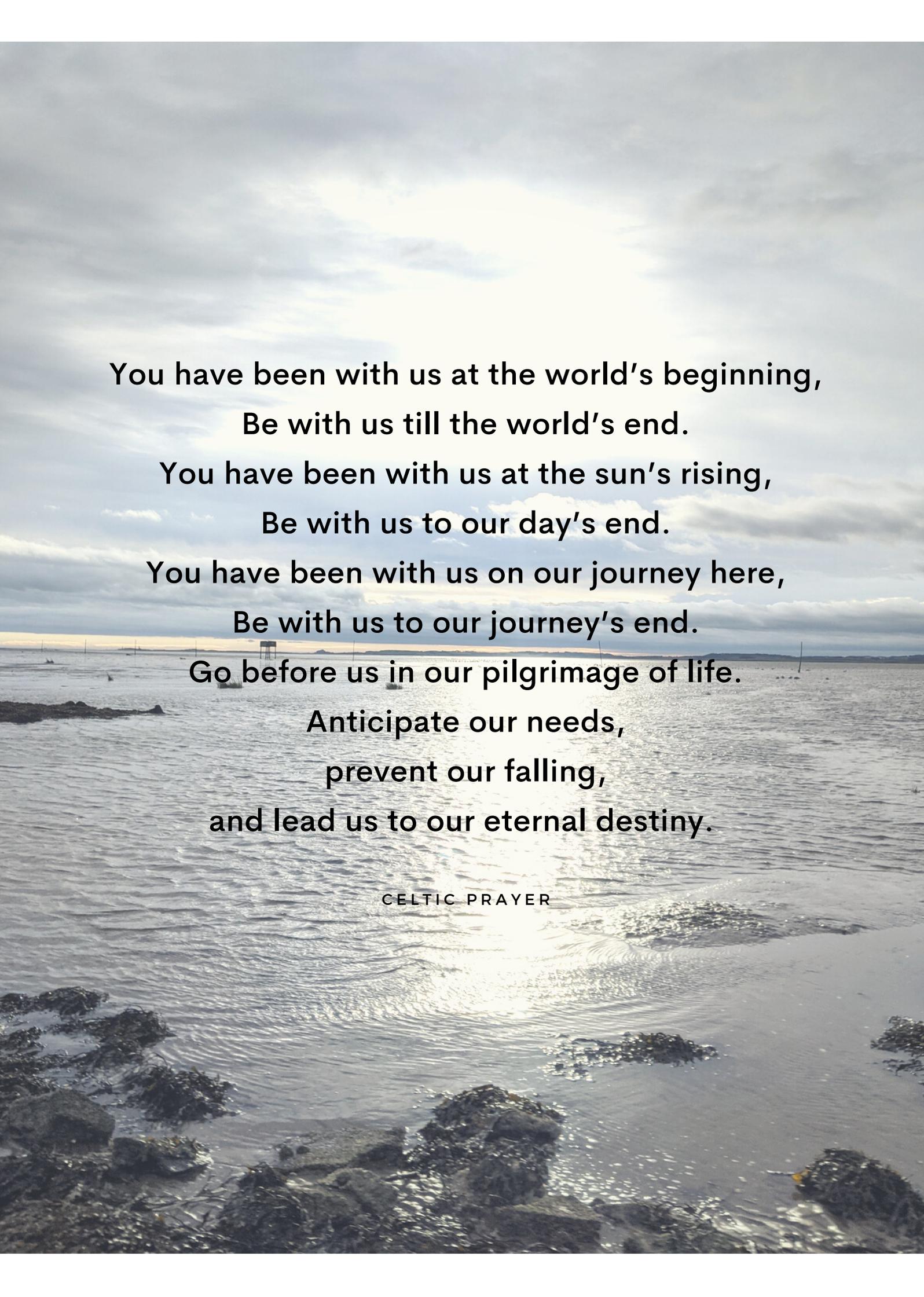
There is much to find here as you walk. Amongst the stones and rocks are treasures of sea glass and fragments of old pottery, as well as leftover rubbish.

As you make this return journey, what are you taking with you? What surprising treasure is there to discover on your own path?

"Do not expect / to return
by the same road.
Home is always / by another way
and you will know it
not by the light / that waits for you
but by the star / that blazes inside you
telling you / where you are
is holy
and you are welcome
here."

- Jan Richardson, The Map You Make Yourself





You have been with us at the world's beginning,
Be with us till the world's end.

You have been with us at the sun's rising,
Be with us to our day's end.

You have been with us on our journey here,
Be with us to our journey's end.

Go before us in our pilgrimage of life.

Anticipate our needs,
prevent our falling,
and lead us to our eternal destiny.

CELTIC PRAYER

For Tara,
my anam cara and fellow pilgrim,
who will walk these sands and paths one day soon.

And for Jen,
who walked them already with me,
and found thin places of prayer, tears and laughter
together here.



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If you have enjoyed this virtual
pilgrimage you may wish to make a
donation towards my ongoing work:
paypal.me/fionalynnekj

