

St. David's Patronal Feast
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St. David's Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA
March 3, 2024
The Third Sunday in Lent
Intergenerational Sermon

This statue of St. David has lived in Frank Allen's office here at St. David's for a long time. It was there to greet me when I arrived in January. Today is the observed Feast Day for St. David – a saint of the church, our saint for this church. This past week I did a lot of thinking, research, reading, and investigating this so I could find out everything I could about St. David. And I stared a lot at the statue. It even came home with me one night so I could look at it some more (I made sure to buckle him up in the car so he wouldn't get hurt). After I was done reading and learning about St. David', I realized is that most of what we know about St. David we can see this statue.

So – take a good look at St. David here. What are things about him that you see?

Dove & Mound

St. David's most famous miracle happened one day when there was a huge meeting of church people outdoors. There were a lot of bishops there that day, and they all wanted to speak – but none of them could make themselves heard. David's teacher from when he was a boy, Paulinius, was in the crowd and he said: "Send for David," he said, "I know him to be wise. He will tell us the Good News." So the crowd waited for David. He arrived and began to preach (he was known to be a VERY good preacher) – and after he started speaking, the ground below him rumbled and groaned, and then began to grow – higher and higher – raising him up so everyone – even the people way in the back of the crowd could hear him. His voice rang out like a trumpet! It was a miracle!

Toward the end of his sermon, God sent a white dove that swooped over the crowd and landed on David's shoulder. When you see statues or pictures of St. David, there's usually always the dove pictured with him, on his shoulder.

Book

This is thought to be a Gospel Book (show the one we have on the altar) – all the stories that we read from the Gospels on Sunday morning.

St. David – even when he was a very young boy – loved to study and learn new things (how about you – do you love to study and learn?). When he was young,

instead of going to an elementary school or middle school, like you, he went to a monastery – which is a community of men that live and work and teach and pray together all the time. The men that live in a monastery are called “monks.”

St. David was taught in a monastery by a monk named Paulinius, who taught him languages and history, and about the stories of the Bible. David worked very hard and studied each night. When he grew up he dedicated his whole life to serving God. He became known as one of the best preachers the country of Wales had ever seen.

Big Hands (Miracle)

When David was a young man he went to go and study with a teacher named Paulinus. The teacher was growing old and was going blind. He asked all his pupils to try to cure him, but none was able to do it. Then David took a turn. David loved Paulinius deeply and they were very good friends because Paulinius had spent so much time teaching David, especially about the Christian faith and what it meant to follow Jesus. David reached out his big hands toward Paulinius, took his thumb, and made a sign of the cross on Paulinius' forehead (ask children to make the sign of the cross on themselves, and then each other). And guess what? When he made the sign of the cross and touched the old man's eyes a miracle happened! Paulinius was able to see clearly again.

Flowers

WALES

Does anyone one know these flowers are called? (Hint: they are ALL OVER St. David's church grounds)

Why do you think there would be daffodils on a St. David statue?

St. David is the patron saint of Wales – kind of like their spiritual mascot.

He was born in Wales (year: 500), grew up in Wales, spent most of his life ministering in Wales, and died in Wales (about 589).

People from Wales came over to the United States, and specifically here in Pennsylvania, hundreds of years ago to farm the land.

There are still people here today who have ancestors from Wales.

Who here has ancestors from Wales?

VEGETARIAN/PLANTS

St. David had some pretty big feelings about plants!

He was a vegetarian (didn't eat any meat) which was very rare in those days.

Ate only bread and herbs and drank only water.

- And later when he was the head of a monastery, all the monks that lived there couldn't eat meat either or drink beer – only water and herbs and bread.

- David was kind of strict about food and water.

One of his nicknames was (Aquaticus or Dewi Ddyfrwr in Welch) or “the Waterman”

- because he'd only allow his monks to drink water
- when he had made a mistake against God (what we call “sin”) he would stand up to his neck in a lake of cold water reciting lines from the Bible to make amends.
- It is also said that milestones during his life were marked by the appearance of springs of water.

Oh – and David also ate leeks.

I have some here – what do they smell like? (onions)

Where David lived in Wales was near the ocean, and the soil was thin and didn't have many

nutrients in it. So the only things that really grew well were leeks and onions.

LEEKs

There's a specific story about leeks and St. David, too.

There was once a big battle between David's people of Wales and another army called the Saxons. They fought each other with swords for a long time, as the men of Wales fought to protect their land from the Saxon invaders.

But despite how hard they were trying, David's army was losing.

In the heat of the battle it was difficult to tell who was a Saxon and who was from Wales.

The fact that both sides wore similar clothing made the fight all the more confusing.

David, then a monk, noticed that this was becoming a grave problem.

As the Welsh lost more and more ground, he cried out to them,

“Welshmen, you must mark yourselves

so that you can better tell who is Saxon and who is Welsh.”

David plucked a leek from the ground and continued,

“Here, wear these so you will know that any soldier who does not have a leek is your

enemy.”

(HAVE KIDS PUT LEEKS ON THEIR FOREHEADS)

Some of the soldiers thought this was a rather odd idea, but David clearly belonged to God so they went along with it.

Soon every Welsh soldier was wearing a leek on his helmet.

They attacked the invaders and before long, the Welsh had won the battle.

Crest

- Family symbol (Coat of Arms)

- Gold cross with black cinquefoil (a kind of flower that grows in Wales)
 - From the rose family
 - Signifies love, money, health, power, and wisdom
- David's family had a noble ancestry
 - related to the famous King Arthur
 - grandfather a king

Cloak

Cold in Wales! And rainy and ocean breezes

David was a missionary (means he traveled around Wales and England telling the stories about Jesus and love and how to follow Jesus)

- he also built monasteries – 11 to be exact – in different parts of Wales – so, again, traveling

Way back then, in the 500s, people traveled on horseback – and not a lot of roads

So they needed big cloaks – which they used for warmth while riding horses, as sleeping bags when they spent the night outside/camped, and as protection from arrows and swords.

“Dress”

Dalmatic/vestment

Usually deacons wear them (Emily – she's a deacon – helps the church take care of people out in the world – feeding hungry people, visiting lonely people, caring for sick people)

- that's what David did --
- A servant
- Humble; austere
- Led his monks to serve the community – farming/food; BEES (like St. David's) – for honey

Bishop Crook & Miter

Little is known of his early life,

but while fairly young he founded a monastery, near Menevia (SW Wales) and became its abbot.

David was later elected bishop – Primate of Wales

Crook and Miter – signs of a bishop; what bishops wear when they lead worship

But here's the thing about David – **he didn't want to be a bishop.**

All he wanted to do was to study and pray in the quiet of his monastery.

He was absolutely positive that God was calling him to live as a monk leading the other monks.

The story goes that David was virtually dragged to a gathering of bishops who were having a disagreement about how to understand the scriptures.

David was called in and helped them work through their arguments (they were VERY mad at each other).

He was so good at helping them bring peace that the Archbishop chose David to become the new Archbishop, the Primate of Wales (head of all the other bishops).

HAVE YOU EVER been asked to do something that you DID NOT WANT TO DO?
(get responses)

I wonder if David was angry about it? Or even disappointed? Or sad? Or resentful?

He was uprooted from something he very much wanted to do and plopped by God into the midst of some other life.

Even with all of those feelings, David listened to God and lived as best he could as an Archbishop, even though he had thought he was to live as a monk.

David followed what God was calling him to do.

And I think this might be the reason why David is a saint = because sometimes God calls us to something we neither anticipated or wanted – calls us to a life that is not what we had pictured for ourselves

- David worked through his disappointment and followed God
- Maybe he's a saint because it takes a lot of trust and faith to follow God in a new direction
- The true needs of the world sought David out and he followed.

LAST STORY

The last thing I want to share with you about St. David is a story about when he died.

David lived as a student, a missionary, a monk, the head of a monastery, and a bishop.

And in all of those parts of his life he was known as a kind man,

- a person who kind of walked the middle way through life.
- He didn't get angry or frustrated easily

David spent a whole life focused on little things –

being kind to every person he met,
responding to needs of people around him and in his community,
praying and trying to love God every minute of every day.

Because over a life time a million little things is a really big thing.

The Sunday before he died David gave a sermon – and he said:
“Be joyful.
Keep the faith.
Follow the example I have set,
and do the little things that you have seen me do.”

He died the next day.

“Do the little things” is a motto of Wales.

Want to end with a prayer, and it’s a “repeat-after-me” prayer for St. David:

Dear God:

Thank you for giving us St. David.

Through his life,

he showed us how to be faithful to you.

David taught us

that little things

are big things.

He also taught us

that we can live on leeks if we have to.

We give thanks for our church,

for our saint,

and for each other.

Amen.

And now, Thomas is going to lead us in saying together the Nicene Creed. As we do that, kids can follow me to the side, and everyone who wants one can have a “Do the little things” St. David’s pin.

Sources:

“Saint David: Patron Saint of Wales,” by Lois Rock.

“Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints,” pp.252-253.

“Brightest and Best: A Companion to the Lesser Feasts and Fasts,” Sam Portaro, pp.52-53.

Various on-line sources, available upon request.

“Back 40”:

Became a leader and guardian of the Christian faith in Wales

Toward the end of his life he had several Irish saints as his pupils at the monastery

David a very hard worker and demanded a lot from his monks –

- Required they live simple, frugal lives
- Self-discipline in everyday things would help them live righteously

- Cultivated the thin soil, pulling the plow themselves (they couldn't use animals to help them) to prepare the land for crops
- Cold sea breezes and thin soil – a few vegetables were able to be farmed – specifically leeks and onions
- Very generous with poor people, pilgrims, and travellers
- Monastery life was very strict, the brothers having to work very hard, cultivating the land and pulling the plough. Many crafts were followed – beekeeping, in particular, was very important. The monks had to keep themselves fed as well as provide food and lodging for travellers. They also looked after the poor.

Miracle story:

A local ruler became very jealous of his popularity, and his wife told him to send servants with sticks to beat David and his monks – but as they came to attack the monks, their arms lost all their strength, and all they could do was to hurl filthy insults at them. When they returned home, they found that all their cattle had died. They returned to the monks and asked forgiveness. This time when they went back, all their cattle had come back to life.

David was baptized by a blind monk. Some of the water from the font splashed onto his eyes, and immediately he could see.

Became a missionary – travelling the hills and valleys where Wales and England meet. Helped people understand more about how to live as followers of Jesus. Wherever he went – he was eager to set up monasteries (where men lived in communities and dedicated themselves to worshipping God and to farming the land – they provided for themselves and those in need).
learned that Archbishop Dubricius chose him as his own successor as Primate of Wales. David later founded eleven other monasteries in Wales and made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

To be uprooted from something one wants very much to do and be plopped into the midst of some other task – if it becomes the work of a lifetime, it's an agony.

DISAPPOINTMENT = have you ever been asked to do something you didn't want to do? Or have things ever turned out differently than you had hoped?

To me – why David is a saint – sometimes God calls us to something we neither anticipated or wanted – not the vision we had for ourselves = David – worked through disappointment and followed what God was calling him to do
God grabbing us by the scruff of the neck and pressing us into service

No matter where we hide, what our personal preference for peace, solitude, even isolation might be – the true needs of the world seek us out and grab hold of us, compelling us – inviting us – to be what GOD calls us to be: love incarnate,

light to the world, finding and filling the darkest corners not with words, but with the living presence of God in each and every one of us.

Becoming a missionary David travelled throughout Wales and Britain and even made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he was consecrated bishop. He founded 12 monasteries including Glastonbury and one at Minevia (St. Davids) which he made his bishops seat. He was named Archbishop of Wales at the Synod of Brevi (Llandewi Brefi), Cardiganshire in 550.

