Beulah Youth Fellowship – Caldey Island Retreat (August 2018)

Day 1

Today was full of excitement for Beulah Youth Fellowship as they met to embark upon their adventure of a retreat to Caldey Island. The group travelled in convoy to Tenby, Pembrokeshire before catching the last boat across to the Island. The boat ride to Caldey made the helper Spud (Sean) scared out of his mind as the seasickness was too much for him to deal with, however we helped calm him!

We arrived in Caldey where due to the low tides we were treated to a trip on an amphibious vehicle - The Duck. However the landing at Caldey was welcomed by all as the anticipation levels were high and George was eager to swim in the freezing sea water. He was joined by the ballsy few who dared enter the plunge pool of Caldey which Liz and Elaine didn’t dare enter!

After dinner we found our way back down to the beach for our first spiritual session where we followed the footsteps (written in Beulah) into worship led by the clarinet and thoughtful prayers from Marion. The footsteps led to the incoming tide where everyone engaged in stone skimming and 'accidentally' drenching Joe! Gaynor had a very eventful evening beginning with a moment of curiosity on the seafront where investigation of a gigantic jellyfish led to her being marooned on a rapidly diminishing island, before on the return to the guest house treating us to some excellent thespian skills after being attacked by a long range airstrike!

Following a quick return visit to the guest house, the intrepid Beulah Youths went on a discovery mission of the island where a sign post labelled 'Chocolate Factory' brought on a certainty for further investigation. The distracted youths continued on their exploration before reaching the hundred and twenty seven year old lighthouse which was constructed from limestone by Mr Nelson. The lighthouse was the perfect place to watch the magnificent sunset emanate a line of fire over the tranquil sea and the quintessential way to finish the day.

Day 2

The day began at 8:15am when everybody arrived for breakfast and their first morning on Caldey Island. We had much of the island to explore with Marion and the leaders. Just round the corner from the guesthouse, Calvery House stood looking over the sea at Tenby, surrounded by wildlife and berries (suitable to eat). It held a sentimentality that was appreciated by a lady reading in front of the crucifix, wanting to spread the words of the bible.

We headed to the beach for a few hours of fun in the sun. However, the weather took its toll. Despite the wind and the rain, we discussed self expression and representation. It was a humbling experience that undoubtedly brought the group together as we learned more about one another. Craft skills proved to be limited as the group made paper boats from vague instructions. Once the group finished, Spud organised a game of cricket which was ended with a jacked potato and baked beans for lunch.

A visit to the Chocolate Factory was well overdue as the group stocked up with a
large quantity to last them the trip. Caldey Island was very busy as the weather improved, and as a result, so did the atmosphere.

The group revisited the beach and enjoyed the sunshine by playing and swimming in the sea which seemed a lot colder than the day before. After showering and having dinner, everybody headed up to the monastery for their first service with the monks. The room was dead silent and held an air of stillness and tranquility. The group experienced a series of Psalms songs and were taken in by the peacefulness of thought and retreat.

Afterwards the groups socialized and engaged in deep topics with Spud, including psychopaths, NHS funding and teenage phases! The night was wrapped up with an intense game of scrabble crowning Joe (aka Marion) as the winner.

Day 3
It was an early start for the Beulah youths as we gathered outside the guesthouse at 3am in the pitch black. Wrapped in layers and equipped with torches to guide the way through the dark, the group tiredly headed through the woods to the monastery. The church was peaceful and captivating as the monks carried out their practice. Despite sleep deprivation, we were fascinated with the atmosphere of the service. We returned to our beds at 4.45am only to wake again at 8am to met for breakfast and then embarked upon further exploration of the island. Due to the harsh tides between Tenby and the island, no tourist boats ran on this day, meaning we had the entire island to share only with the monks and others who lived on the island. This made the island feel even more relaxing and truly cut off from the world.

We visited St David’s Church to witness the credited stain glass windows (of which we have a knitted version in Beulah) and the resting place of many past monks.

Later, we planned and organised an afternoon of activities for the rest of the group. Using the Gospel of John, we led a service of exploration around Caldey which centred around hope, sacrifice, reflection and forgiveness. The session was ended by throwing a pebble from the beach into the sea. The pebble was to symbolise burdens or worries that the group wished to leave behind on their retreat. Throwing the pebble was a physical release of the stress for the group. We thought this was a good way of ending out time of worship.

Ann worked her magic with Brother Titus and charmed him into joining us in the afternoon as the old guard enjoyed a well earned cuppa in the guest house. Brother Titus led us in deep thought through poems he has written on the island whilst also enlightening us with some of the sacrifices made to invoke himself as a monk. He told us stories of his racing ideal and battles with Niki Lauda and Graham Hill and how hard it was to turn his back on his beloved motorsports however, "It is worth and not in vain, to live a life of love, the simple life, the silent life of prayer and I would do it again".
In the evening, the group gathered for communion in the Priary Church, which is the oldest active church in Wales, dating from the 12th century, soon after the island was granted to Sir Robert fitz Martin in 1113.

The church was candle lit which created an aura for a peaceful service. The service was led by Youth Fellowship and we were joined by all the occupants of the guesthouse after some had returned from Compline. We came together on our last night on the island to share in prayers and communion, accompanied by sung responses with clarinet. To finish our communion service, we all took a moment to reflect on our spiritual journey at Caldey.

Day 4

Our final day on the island brought an early start (though not as early as the one before) as we had to pack up all our luggage and clean and sweep our rooms (there was a lot of sand due to frequent beach trips!) ready for breakfast at 7.30am before we caught the first boat back to Tenby. We said goodbye to the owners of the guesthouse and thanked them for our lovely stay, then made our way to the jetty where our boat would depart. Before leaving we spotted Brother Titus operating the crane to move objects from the boat. He came down to meet us and take photos, and then we were on the boat back over. Once we landed in Tenby, we spent some time walking around and eating ice creams. We were given the gift of a beautiful candle holder bought by Gaynor from the Caldey shop which had a design of the monastery of it, which we will continue to use in Youth Fellowship for years to come to remind us of our trip. By 11am we were on our way back to Cardiff, after a thoroughly enjoyable and relaxing time on the island.