

CELTIC CHRISTIAN SERVICE OF WORSHIP

NOVEMBER 17 2019

Prepared by Rev. Peggy McDonagh

PRELUDE *Early One Morning*
 Danny Boy
 Afton Water

Colin Hand
Stanley Vann
Colin Hand

WELCOME AND NEWS OF THE COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION TO WORSHIP

Welcome to this Celtic service of worship in which we will honour some of the beautiful traditions of the Celtic Christian faith. Many churches and people have found that Celtic spirituality provides an effective way not only to weave together the separated strands of Christianity and its detachment from the goodness of Creation but also to help us in our efforts to heal the fragmented world.

The greatest discovery that people make as they learn about Celtic Christianity is that it is about living simply in life, following the Way of Christ, travelling the journey in the everyday ordinariness of life –the pain and the pleasure, the heartaches and the hopes, the disappointment and the dreams. This is significant because spirituality is embedded in our ordinary lives and how we experience God and live compassionately.

Within the world of Celtic Christianity, we discover a place rich in Spirit and imagination. There is no separation between the visible and the invisible, between Spirit and Nature, between human and Divine, between heaven and earth. Divine love and protection are found not only in Church and in a heavenly afterlife, but in the everyday life of work, home, and play. People lived in close communion with God as they used all their senses to experience their world and God because the senses were guides to take them deep into the inner world of their hearts. Stories, rituals, hymns, music, and prayers shaped their days and named and honoured their day to day existence in which they knew the presence of God as a very real essence in their lives.

Of greatest importance to the Celts were rituals, prayers and blessings for protection. Prayers and incantations to the Christ to surround and protect instilled a sense of courage and determination. As protectors and light bearers come forward, I invite you to take a moment to bring yourself fully into this sacred time, to breathe in

divine love and light, and to feel through the movement of ritual, hymns, songs, and music, the heartbeat of God stirring within your heartbeat and the heartbeat of the universe.

CHANT AND ENTRANCE OF CHRIST CANDLE AND PROTECTORS AND CANDLE BEARERS

THE ENCIRCLING AND ENTRANCE INTO WORSHIP

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

OPENING HYMN

Christ Be Beside Me (Tune VU #409)
(words adapted from 'St. Patrick's Breastplate' (8th Century) by J. Quinn, S.J.)

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

...to receive and respond to the wisdom of God

INVITATION TO OFFER OUR GIFTS

OFFERTORY

The Lark in the Clear Air

Composer: Anonymous Irish traditional; Arrangement: Ralph Vaughan Williams; Poem written by: Sir Samuel Ferguson; Flute arrangement: Caroline Knight

RECEPTION OF OFFERING GIFTS & DEDICATION PRAYER

ANTHEM

Ancient Words

Lynn DeShazo & Mary McDonald

REFLECTION I AND READINGS *The interconnectedness of life*

Readings: Irish Incantation, Job 12; 7-10; Acts 17:24

Song: Bonnie Portmore

(Irish traditional folk song, Original ballad: The Highlander's Farewell to Bonny Portmore (1740s) Singer: Caroline Knight - based on the song performed by Canadian singer Loreena McKennitt)

REFLECTION I

The people known as the Celts included the Irish, Scots, Manx, Welsh, Cornish and most of the rest of the Gaelic speaking lands. They were nomadic tribes who practised variations of common earth-centered religious traditions.

The Celts were a people of the farms and fields and armies on the move largely comprised of many cultures with no written language. Because most people were unable to read and write they had powerful natural memorization skills. They loved to sit by the hearth to tell the great stories of their traditions. The stories, songs and rituals that shaped communal life were written down by a small sector of the population, a class of men and women known as the Druids...the Priesthood of Gaea. The stories, poetry, hymns, and prayers of the highland peoples were collected before the Gaelic oral tradition was corrupted, and placed in the famous Carmina Gadelica, the most complete anthology of Celtic oral tradition ever assembled.

With the arrival of Christianity many of the Celtic people embraced the Roman Catholic faith; however, they never gave up their sense of belonging to creation and they continued to be astutely aware of their interconnectedness with all life, and they would burst into song, or prayer, or poetry, as they expressed their gratitude for and love of life. Their combined Catholic and Celtic faith permeated every aspect of their lives.

We are told that in the Celtic mythology of the day the poet-shamans were able to shape-shift into other forms of life to expand their consciousness. The following Incantation was written by a shaman in ancient Ireland in which he beautifully describes his expanded consciousness and deep connection to all of life.

INCANTATION

I am the wind that blows on the sea,
And I am the wave of the ocean,
I am the sound the sea makes,
I am the stag of seven tines,
I am the bull of seven fights,
I am the hawk upon the rock,
I am a teardrop of the sun.
I am the fairest of flowers,
I am the board of boldness,

I am the salmon in the pool,
And I am the lake in the plain,
I am the word of skill,
I am the spear-point of battle.
I am the god who kindles fires in the head.
Who makes wise the company on the mountain?
Who foretells the ages of the moon?
Who knows the secret-resting place of the sun?

The Celtic monks believed in and taught about the close relationship between heaven and earth, the divine and humanity. For them, creation told one part of the gospel story and the scriptures told the rest. They pointed to the seasons and the land as evidence of God's care. Heaven and earth — God and humanity — dwelt together on earth in the day-to-day, though not in fullness or in purity. Similarly, the ancient Hebrew and Christian communities knew well the interconnectedness of nature, humanity, and God.

Job 12: 7-10 "But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

Because the peoples of the ancient world intuitively sensed that all life was interconnected and because they valued nature as an extension of God, it was to be protected, cared for and honored. Both the Celtic monks and the Hebrew prophets taught that sin messes life up but still God is interested in daily life and in what people do on earth to each other and to the earth.

For the ancient people it was exceedingly important that the messiness of life did not disrupt creation. With the passage of time we know that the earth has been and continues to be tragically abused and continually disrupted. Bonnie Portmore is a haunting traditional Celtic folk song that tells of Ireland's old oak forests being destroyed for military and shipbuilding purposes. Specifically, the Great Oak of Portmore. As Caroline sings Bonnie Portmore let us offer silent prayers, asking Creation for forgiveness for how it has been and continues to be misused, abused, and corrupted.

REFLECTION II – Celtic Sense of Belonging

As I mentioned earlier, the Celts held a special reverence for the environment and they felt a profound sense of belonging to nature, to the cosmos, to God, and to each other as we have heard expressed today in the liturgy and songs.

When we observe nature, we see that everything has its place, every element is unique, everything belongs; there is balance. Every part must connect with every other part for creation to be complete. Similarly, each of us is a unique person; we are differently shaped, differently colored, and different in our personalities. No other person feels your emotions or knows your life and your stories the way you do. Yet not one of us can live in isolation, separate from others and still be fully human. John O'Donahue says that we all journey alone but "it is our nature to seek out belonging, to be in relationship." Within those relationships we must value each other in the sharing of our resources. The early Christian communities understood this philosophy.

1st Corinthians 12:12-14 "Just as the human body is one, though it has many parts that together form one body, so too is Christ. For by one Spirit we all were immersed and mingled into one single body. In fact, the human body is not one single part, but rather many parts mingled into one."

Acts 4:32-35 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and they distributed to each as anyone had need."

Just like the first Christian communities, the ancient Celtic communities knew how to foster belonging. No one was excluded, people shared their resources, everyone had equal access to goods and services, and everyone experienced the love of Christ in ways that enable each person to feel valued and accepted.

For the Celts belonging went deep; it was not a superficial sense of external attachment to places, things, and people. Belonging was the living and passionate presence of hearts connecting in meaningful, supporting and caring ways. When people felt connected in community, in family and in nature they were able to “endure external pressures and confusion” because they were sure of the ground upon which they stood. People felt anchored, just as a tree is anchored when it sinks its roots deep into the soil. As our roots sink deeper, we grow stronger in our togetherness, and we “awaken to all our potential and gifts that sleep in the clay of our hearts.” Belonging is freedom. It frees us to live with openness, contentment, and love.

In our modern world it often feels as if our daily lives and our spirituality are disconnected. We have lost that sense of Oneness with the land, with our communities, with the rest of humanity and with the God of Life. In this relentlessly busy digital age, it is increasingly more difficult to find communities of acceptance and love in which we do feel that we belong. For many people the Church provides such a community of belonging.

Scottish theologian John Swinton observes, “To belong, you have to be missed. There’s something really, really important about that. People need to long for you, to want you to be there. When you’re not there, they should go looking for you... Belonging should be the goal of all communities. Particularly religious communities. It seems that the primary thing religious communities can do is create spaces where people can learn to care for one another, even if people are quite different, in some respects, from yourself.”

Together in this place we are surrounded by friends, strangers, laughter, song, prayer....all pulling us into the deep wonder of humans connecting with our hearts, with our care, with our joy, with our beauty, with our warmth, with our hope, and with God, who surrounds, protects, embodies us. Let us take a moment for intentional belonging in which we turn to each other and make one another feel welcome and loved.
(Greeting)

On this day as we honour the Celtic tradition may we also celebrate that we are a community and we gather in our commonalities and differences. Let us celebrate that as a community we are about caring, demonstrating values, interacting with honesty, sharing God’s love, and acting with compassion. As the ancient Celtic people felt deeply rooted in their communities may we too sink our roots deeply into this community

of faith that blesses and sustains us and connects us to the heart of God. Together let us sing the Irish poem *Be Thou My Vision* that expresses a person's deep connection to God written by an 8th Century Monk, Dallan Forgaill as a tribute to St. Patrick's wholehearted loyalty to God.

HYMN Be Thou My Vision

VU #642 vs. 1 - 4

(Ancient Irish traditional melody)

PRAYER TIME – As the Celtic people knew, rituals are central to life because they call us back to our centre, back to the Divine. With each candle, song, and prayer the habit of our daily routine is transformed into sacred time. Rituals help us to remember that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We are linked to the Divine; we have a sacred connection with the land, with each other and with our ancestors. I invite you to prepare yourself for prayer. It is important to prepare our hearts and bodies for prayer by relaxing, freeing our minds and opening our hearts. The words of this prayer are taken from Kuno Meyo's translation of the 8th century poem sometimes attributed to St. Patrick and entitled "St. Patrick's Breastplate." It is sung by Rita Connolly. This prayer-poem served as a prayer for protection against the perils faced by medieval people. Under your protection, Christ our shield, we place ourselves, body and soul. Under your protection, we enter into prayer....

...and be blessed.

BENEDICTION

J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Prayers from IONA*

As we leave this sacred gathering

May Christ be a bright flame before us.

**May Christ be a guiding star above us,
the light and love we see in others' eyes;
May Christ keep us in a love that is tender,
in a love that is true;
May Christ keep us in a love that is strong
today, tomorrow, and always.**

POSTLUDE *Riversong – Celtic Celebration*

R.Emerson

(In this piece composer Roger Emerson captures all the spark and color of the Celtic tradition and its celebration of the power of nature to give protection, strength and beauty.)

Beannachd Dia dhuit

(Blessings of God be with you - ScotsGaelic)

