The Friends of God – A Celtic Evangelism Lesson

1. We left our story last week at 670AD when the power centers of government and Rome shut down much of the Celtic Christian missionaries and their churches. This is not the first or only time this has occurred. Sociologists have long seen a pattern where the nongrowing church insists on exerting power over the growing church.

2. We can see this in business, as well. When K Mart bought Sears, many of us feared what eventually happened. Kool-Aid bought out several competitors, all of which were tastier, and killed them. Rome insisted that all churches look like theirs and all clergy answer to them regardless of the different nations and tribes in which the clergy found themselves.

3. But, back to the Celtic evangelism model. It was simply this: relate to people, identify with them, engage them in friendship, conversation and ministry. Find what they need or what their concerns are and walk with them through that, helping them find solutions when possible. Staying with them even when there were no solutions. Be **anam cara**. That is why we had our reading from Deuteronomy 6 – this is an "along the way" faith.

4. The result? People were attracted to authentic faith and found that they belonged before they believed. St. Patrick referred to that as "giving the authentic sign." He insisted that his team live what they said they believed so that they were truly salt and light, cities on a hill.

5. As Aidan wrote about Columba, "The best recommendation of his teaching to all was that he taught them no other way of life than that which he himself practiced among his fellows."

6. People were taught to use whatever gifts they had to praise God and to help their neighbors. The study of Celtic Christianity came up with four terms used by the people and by the team (not sure which came first) for the people who served them and loved them.

7. Light Bringer: We have Christians in the medical field today who are digging wells, providing on site medical help, and improving the lives

of the people around them – even before speaking to them about Christ. While some might criticize this as poor priorities, Jesus would disagree. He often healed and fed people before they were taught…IF they were taught at all. Gaining converts didn't seem to be his mission; gaining coworkers who go about doing good, was.

a. Light Bringers can be scientists, engineers, medical people, school teachers – anyone who brings their knowledge base and puts it into action to improve the lives of those around them.
b. In Celtic art, they are seen as the opposite of darkness. They bring light. Where there is worry, they bring peace of mind. Here there is confusion, they bring understanding. Where there is pain, they bring healing. It reminds me of the opening of the Bible: Genesis 1:1-3 and also John 1:1-5
c. It has long been the fashion in academia to criticize missionaries for making improvements in the lives of those they find but Light Bringers continue on anyway. That is who they are. It is how they serve the Lord.

8. Cross Bringers: this is a very interesting group. Here are the brave, those who risk themselves on the behalf of others. Here are soliders, judges, law enforcement personnel, firemen…and even ministers who put themselves into harm's way if that's what it takes to tell the story of Jesus in actions and words.
    a. They have been represented in our own culture in many forms. Think of the Freedom Riders and all who fought for civil rights, or for the end of slavery, or who, even day, reach into Sudan, Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria and other countries where Christians are being killed, kidnapped, or persecuted or where the slave trade is still active.
    b. They can, yes, be found wearing uniforms and carrying a firearm but they are also found writing letters to government officials, asking them to protect the unborn, or using their accountancy skills to help people in poverty or to protect those the world wants to use and discard.
    c. They are called Cross Bringers because they bring their death with them. Revelation 12:11; Hebrews 11:36-40.
    d. They bear the cross to risk it all for the Savior who carried his cross for them. It is who they are. It is how they serve the cross.

9. Friendship Weaver: Only Christ can heal the divisions among us. Some in St. Patrick's team were known for never bringing judgment on people or their culture. Instead, they entered into that culture and healed it by bringing Christ into it (the contrast between areas where Christ is, or has been, with those where the story has not been told).
    a. Think of Andrew here. They introduce people to Christ and to each other. They build bridges. They are the peacemakers so beloved by God. They are the daysman-redeemer that Job called out for. Matthew 5:7-9
    b. They live cross shaped lives because they are always linking the vertical and the horizontal, God and man, man and God, and man to man.
    c. Some are family counselors, some are church leaders and some are neighbors who overcome petty arguments to heal divisions on their block. Some are family members who gently work to heal their family.
    d. Some are church healers. Always connecting people to each other, that is who they are. It is how they serve the cross.

10. Friends of God: think here of St. Francis or Mother Teresa (though the latter could fit in a few categories here). These are the people we think of as "God with skin on." They live as friends of God and love to tell the story of Jesus in word and deed. (Jerry Tallman, Leroy Garrett, Carl Ketcherside, some of our poets and songwriters.
    a. These are Deuteronomy 6 people, and those Jesus described in John 14-16.
    b. They live in harmony with God and you can tell ("I met a Christian at Walmart"). If you ask, they will give you the reason for their peace. They write our songs, our best books.
    c. Many of them are mothers who nurture and love their children in such a way as to bring their children into lifelong faith. Others are fathers or men of faith who serve as examples to younger men, civilizing them through faith, and showing them how to live their lives in tune with a Higher Power.
    d. Because that is who they are. It is how they serve the cross.