

Romans 1 Celtic Christianity & God of Creation

Hope Community 11/15/09

Texts:

Psalm 148:1-14

Romans 1:19-20

Matthew 6:26-29

SERMON

Children's Message: St Patrick – family, faith, capture, slavery, faith, message, escape
love of Ireland, care for captors – those that didn't know - mission,

Celtic Connection - My own Scotch/Irish heritage (mother's side)

Celtic Connection – in our worship today. Music, art, history...

Not all the books and “deep theology” of someone like Luther.

But the “deep theology” of a different kind. *Spiritual sensitivity.*

Celtic, and Ireland, before St Patrick...history of nature worship, druids, “the land”

A people *trying* to respond to the call they felt from God's Spirit

But only a partial truth. Incomplete. Like a puzzle without all the pieces.

The gift that St Patrick gave them was the Word made real, the Christ, the ONE God.

Moved from worshipping nature, to worshipping *the God that created it all*

It was a new thought: the god that made this all.

The Celts embraced this new message. This Gospel.

But combined with the great love of nature they already had

It didn't “*replace*” everything – it filled in, combined with, gave *answer sand added-to*

They expressed in worship, prayer and poetry – “St Patrick's Breastplate”

a prayer of devotion, and for protection...here's just a short bit of it...

“I rise today:

in power's strength, invoking the Trinity, believing in threeness,

confessing the oneness, of Creation's Creator.

...

I rise today:

in Heaven's might, in Sun's brightness, in Moon's radiance,

in Fire's glory, in Lightning's quickness, in Wind's swiftness,

in Sea's depth, in Earth's stability, in Rock's fixity.

...

May your salvation, Lord, be with us always. “

Excerpts from “Patrick's Breastplate”

Attributed to St Patrick ~5th Century

*It is written in the style of a druidic incantation for protection
They started from what they knew, and built from there.*

They expressed it in sacred artwork - The Book of Kells (ref to bulletin cover/screen)

The Celts saw God both above them, untouchable, and also God all around them, in them. God the creator of, and within, everything: *immanence.. “immediate” here, NOW.*

Great awe and appreciation for God’s creation, and the sense of seeing God within everything, isn’t unique to the Celts – take a look at your inserts with me.

Our text from Psalms and Romans today:

From Psalms...

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! ⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. ⁶ He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. ⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, ⁸ fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! ⁹ Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Romans 1:19-20 ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse;

This same thought of an “immanent God” is heard in other ancient voices:

For when one considers the universe, can anyone be so simple-minded as not to believe that the Divine is present in everything, pervading, embracing and penetrating it? For all things depend upon God who is, and nothing can exist which does not have its being in God who is.

St. Gregory of Nyssa (335-395)

Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead he set before your eyes the things that he had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that? *St. Augustine (354-430)*

But of all the ancient Christian communities, the Celts perhaps expressed it more often and more eloquently. They had a reverence for this world God gave us – and a willingness to use it, but a determination to take care of it as well.

These voices should remind us that when we think of our faith, it isn’t just answering the question “what was going saying and doing” way back when the Bible was written, and then jumping all the way forward to now and asking the same question.

It’s important to remember that in all the years in between God has been *IMMINENT*. God in and around us, acting, calling, speaking and changing lives.

For example, Martin Luther wrote

“God’s entire divine nature is wholly and entirely in all creatures, more deeply, more inwardly, more present than the creature is to itself. “

And in his very simple, sometimes humorous style, he also stated:

“God is wholly present in all creation, in every corner, behind you and before you. Do you think that God is [just] sleeping on a pillow in heaven?”

And there’s a more modern Celtic connection I’d like to mention... John Muir

Muir was born in Dunbar Scotland in 1838 childhood and moved to US when 11. Writer, photographer... became champion of preserving our wilderness and pressed Congress and the President to pass the first “National Parks” law in the world – to cherish and take care of the wondrous natural gifts that God has given us.

Muir wrote. . . . “Every particle of rock or water or air has God by its side leading it the way it should go; The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness; In God's wildness is the hope of the world."

Later, he shared this thought: “I do not understand the request of Moses, 'Show me thy glory,' but if he were here . . . after allowing him time to drink the glories of flower, mountain, and sky I would ask him how they compared with those of the Valley of the Nile . . . and I would inquire how he had the conscience to ask for more glory when such oceans and atmospheres were about him. King David was a better observer: 'The whole earth is full of thy glory.'

Perhaps these thoughts of God and nature resonate with you as much as they do with me. I love God’s wonderful, beautiful, glorious creation. Brings me peace, and I feel God’s presence.

At one time, when Kim and I lived in California, we were only about 20minutes from some of the great redwood forests. Muir Woods National Park was just a bit further away to the north. Now we live in Rockford, and this land, this area, drew me as well.

the texture, the combination of hills, forest, water

It is a place of transition between city and country, urban and rural appreciation for... farming, hunting, fishing, camping

I find it sad that many people in urban settings don’t have that blessing

But God IS there, God is *STILL Immanent*, but in the midst of all the concrete and steel I think there is a part of God this is harder to see, harder to hear...

And for most of us, our lives are no longer so closely tied to the earth, and we don’t spend as much daily through our lives working and walking in the land. Most of us spend much

of our time indoors, at desks, in front of computers and televisions. We drive in cars rather than walk. These things tend to distance us from this wonderful creation...

But it is still part of our call, part of our discipleship, to appreciate and care for God's creation. It was given to us so that through it we may find life, and in it we may see God.

The ELCA has a social statement, sort of our position and sense of discipleship, titled "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice" in it, we state:

Humans, in service to God, have special roles on behalf of the whole of creation. Made in God's image, we are called to care for the Earth as God cares for the Earth.

That's a broad statement.

Made in God's image, we are called to care for the Earth as God cares for the Earth.

It captures part of the thought and spirituality of the ancient Celtic Christians. It expresses the great mission of John Muir.

It is part of our mission as well. Because the Bible teaches us that Christ has created the universe, gives it life and sustains it, and has reconciled everything to God, then our actions should participate in Christ's creating, sustaining, and reconciling work.

As we appreciate God IN creation, God's IMMANENCE, and find it our responsibility maybe not a call to do "great things" like John Muir but to accept the call to responsible "earthkeeping" of this creation open to little things -
recycling, less waste, re-usable (styrofoam vs paper cups vs mugs)
things that care for the world, hold it in trust, save it for others.

Tim Garton, et al ...

It is all part of giving glory to God. Giving praise that God is WITH us. Thanks and glory be to God.

Please join me in a prayer... this one happens to be an ancient Jewish one, rather than Celtic... but it is beautiful.

"How wonderful, O Lord, are the works of your hands! The heavens declare your glory: the arch of sky displays your handiwork. In your love you have given us the power to behold the beauty of your world robed in all its splendor. The sun and the stars, the valleys and the hills, the fivers and lakes, all disclose your presence. The roaring breakers of the sea tell of your awesome might. The beasts of the field and the birds of the air bespeak your wondrous will. In your goodness you have made us able to hear the music of the world. The voices of loved ones reveal to us that You are in our midst. A divine voice sings through all creation." (An ancient Jewish prayer)

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