

“Life on a Two-Way Street”

Rev. David Gregory

June 23, 2019

Second Sunday after Pentecost

First Reading

from *Consolations* by David Whyte

To come to ground is to find a home in circumstances and in the very physical body we inhabit in the midst of those circumstances and above all to face the truth, no matter how difficult that truth may be; to come to ground is to begin the courageous conversation, to step into difficulty and by taking that first step, begin the movement through all difficulties, to find the support and foundation that has been beneath our feet all along: a place to step onto, a place on which to stand and a place from which to step.

Second Reading

an excerpt from *A Blessing For One Who Is Exhausted* by John O’Donohue

You have travelled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.
Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.
Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.
Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of colour
That fostered the brightness of day.
Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.
Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.



I have some important things to say today, things that have to do with our identity as a community, things that speak to our purpose and to our plans. I consulted the Revised Common Lectionary to see if the traditional scriptures chosen by a committee at Vanderbilt University for all of Christendom had anything relevant to say to our purpose and our plans today. Sometimes they work for our purposes and sometimes they do not. This particular week I didn’t feel compelled to use their suggested scriptures.

Some would look at us and say that we don’t fit the typical mold of a Christian church; they are probably right. As we often like to say, we are “rooted in Christian tradition, but not root-bound by it.” If you’ve hung out with us for any length of time, you know we have no real dogma here. We do not claim a system of theology. There is no doctrinal statement to which we ask you to subscribe.

We do not publish a set of beliefs for you to rattle off for your friends and neighbors, as you try to proselytize them. If anything, we are a people of spiritual *experience*, a community of spiritual consciousness that tries to embody the sensibilities of a young Jewish insurgent rabbi from the first century, who taught his followers to love God and love each other, to care for others as they would care for themselves. It appears that he believed that this summed up the entirety of law. “By this,” he said, “shall everyone know that you are my followers, if you have love for one another.” Western Christianity has sought to take something just that simple and try to make it very complicated.

We exist on the top of this hill in Tiburon to take something complicated and make it very simple. This is why we have agreed (simply, in the words of our church covenant) to live out the questions together hand in hand, to support the fragile, protect the wounded, and give the angered space and time. This is why we dance with the free and celebrate moments of balance while not fearing the unfolding of imbalance. We do believe in the power of God’s revelations. We share a living awareness that faith and hope and love are the inhaling and exhaling of life, as necessary and real as the air we breathe. We pray, study, work and celebrate together, and together we experience life as a spontaneous response to the call of God. This is our covenant together, and more than any other expression, it comes the closest to saying who we are.

In concert with that, you’ve been hearing some other terminology in this place—things like Celtic spirituality, Celtic Christianity, Celtic consciousness. Our friends at the Redwoods have a weekly Celtic spirituality discussion group. Earlier this year, I attended the School of Celtic Consciousness at Bishop’s Ranch in Healdsburg. The leader of that school is John Philip Newell, who will be coming here to CCC next February. His organization Heartbeat Journey has as one of its board members our friend Rob McClellan, the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church right here in Tiburon.

So what is Celtic spirituality and why does it matter to us? It’s a fair question, and one that will not be definitively answered in one sermon because, once again, it isn’t something rooted in dogma. Its roots are in practice, and the experience of it is much in keeping with who we are and what we do here at Community Congregational Church. This is why I’ve chosen our two readings today, one from a favorite English poet, David Whyte, and another from his good friend the late Irish poet John O’Donohue.

As David Whyte says,

To come to ground is to find a home in circumstances and in the very physical body we inhabit in the midst of those circumstances and above all to face the truth, no matter how difficult that truth may be; to come to ground is to begin the courageous conversation, to step into difficulty and by taking that first step, begin the movement through all difficulties, to find the support and foundation that has been beneath our feet all along: a place to step onto, a place on which to stand and a place from which to step.

Celtic spirituality like all spiritual practices is an evolving experience, but one thing we can say is that it emphasizes the presence of the Divine in all people and all things. It does not look for a God in the far-off heavens—a God whose anger must somehow be placated in order to be found by flawed and sinful humans. It recognizes Emanuel-God-With-Us, the incarnation of the Divine in Jesus, but also in you, in me, in the rock outside our door, and in the birds who allow us to share their sanctuary on this hill. And if the Divine is present in all things, then it follows that the earth around us and beneath our feet is worthy of our concern and protection, which is why we feel we cannot go on as a species treating the environment as if it is an expendable resource here for our use and misuse. It is a

fundamental understanding that environmentalism is not a purely political cause, but an organic one, transcending what is moral, and taking us into the realm of what is imperative. If we have a dogma at all, then this is it. I will own that.

Celtic consciousness is not something that I need to introduce as a new idea, because it is a wider expression of a practice that already exists here, one that in some ways has always existed here. We just might not have named it until now. As a practice it does not in any way cause us to throw out our Christian scriptures; rather, it brings us to a fresh reading of the old texts. When Jesus says, "I and my father are one," it causes me to say, "Well, yes; yes you are." When Paul the Apostle stood among the Athenians and proclaimed that in God we "live and move and have our being," I say "absolutely." When King David said, "The earth is God's and all its fullness," or when the books of Moses say that "God saw all that was created and pronounced it good," I can feel my heart expand and take in old words that have new life and new energy for me. So no, we won't be ignoring the Bible here. We will simply be opening our eyes to its greater wealth, not some narrow, impoverished way of looking at it.

With seeds of Celtic consciousness planted among us, we are awakening to how the energy of earth and Spirit are one and the same. We are finding out that "neck-up religion" does not express who we really are. We have long sought to find God in the heavens above, perhaps without noticing Divine Presence in the earth that rises to meet our feet. When you try and ground yourself amid the swirling insanity of our current culture, you may just find that

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Taking time to open the well of colour
That fostered the brightness of day.
Draw alongside the silence of stone
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Be excessively gentle with yourself.
Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.*

Let us make it our covenant today to be excessively gentle with ourselves. Let us be the people of ease who have all the time in the world. Let this experience be our one true calling—our calling, and yes, our religion.

