

Sanctuary First

A PLACE TO BE

Lent: Heaven Touching Earth Part 2 (March 04 - 31 2018)

This is the second part of Heaven Touching Earth, see [Part 1 of our theme](#) (Feb 11 - March 03).

During Lent 2018 we are challenging our strict boundaries between earth and heaven, the physical and the spiritual. We are going to engage with the rich tradition of Celtic Christianity, contemporary interest in mindfulness, wellbeing and spirituality, and consider new ways of being church.

We are inspired by Ian Bradley's book on Celtic Christianity: 'Colonies of Heaven' that explores Celtic models of church and considers what if any might fit the church today. Bradley suggests while many have romanticised Celtic Christianity, there is enough historical evidence to allow 21st century Christians to engage with material that can inspire a new generation of Christians to embrace a more inclusive, welcoming, and grace filled Christianity.

Research is showing an ever increasing interest in topics like wellbeing and mindfulness. While many no longer attend church, a great number of former church members still describe themselves as Christians and an ever increasing number of the younger generation are exploring spirituality through music, or discussion groups online, or by their commitment to justice and equality in our world. Many of these topics form the substance of their regular daily conversations among friends and family.

Date	Subtheme	Readings	Notes
4 March	Sustaining our lives in the presence of God	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Psalm 19 2. 2 Kings 5: 1-15b 3. Psalm 25 4. Psalm 78: 1-6 5. John 2: 13-22 6. Jeremiah 7: 23-28 7. Luke 18: 9-14 	<p>For Celtic Christianity there is nothing secular and nothing sacred. All of life is lived in the presence of the Almighty. Learning to go back to Eden and walk with God 'in the cool of the day' is the longing of the human heart.</p> <p>Developing and nursing a prayer life is the core of this week. Take time to be still, take time to review your day, Take time to reflect on something to be thankful for, take time to confess something you are sorry about. Resolve how you might change in the future. Review tomorrow with all its opportunities.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning to meditate with the heart. Psalm 19 opens the door to understanding the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20: 1-17). 2. God looks on the heart. Naaman was teachable - he humbled himself. Knowledge of God brings us to the place of deep humility. Longing for more. (See also Luke 4: 23-30 and Psalm 42: 1-7). 3. When love and faithfulness meet, a wholehearted offering. 4. Passing the faith to the next generation. The importance of faith stories being told. (See also Deuteronomy 4: 5-9). 5. Turning the tables on the commercialisation of public, communal space. 6. A call to repentance and obedience. 7. Trusting in God's compassion. God's heart is always turned to the person who is contrite. (See also Psalm 51: 15-19).

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11 March	The healing rhythm of repentance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ephesians 2: 1-10 2. John 4: 43-54 3. Ezekiel 47: 1-12, 21-23 4. John 5: 19-24 5. Psalm 106: 6-7, 19-23 6. John 7: 25-30 7. John 7: 37-52 	<p>There is a distinctive pattern to repentance. It begins with the Spirit of God convicting us of our sinfulness. We begin to understand we cannot improve our situation ourselves. All our attempts at self-help fail. In humility we turn to Christ. It is in that turning that we are confronted with the costliness of grace. Mercy, justice, and forgiveness meet us at the foot of the cross.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Considering conviction, in other words: an awareness of sin. (See also: John 3:14-21 and Numbers 21: 4-9). 2. But for God - there would be no repentance. The story in the Gospel illustrates how we need God's intervention in our lives. It also illustrates the act of faith. We cannot change our human condition. It is the gift of God that brings about a change of heart. Discovering the faith to believe. (See also Psalm 3). 3. Repentance often brings about a change of heart which in turn can heal a broken life, like a river bringing vitality and transformation to the land. 4. Repentance brings new life. The new life happens when we hear the voice of God turning us from death to life. (See also Isaiah 49: 8-15). 5. The Great Exchange Fraud. Verse 20 expresses how easily we exchange the true glory for fake glory (see Exodus 32: 1-24). 6. To see the truth and not believe. How many people have drawn close to Jesus but in the end refuse to believe and in doing so miss the greatest discovery of life? Confronted with the Truth we have to make our decisions. The Gospel calls us to the place of decision, 'Come follow me?' (See also Psalm 34: 15-22). 7. The Gospels invite us to begin to decide who Jesus is. The truth is some will doubt, some will put the decision off, and others will believe.

Date	Subtheme	Readings	Notes
18 March	Redeeming the Culture - through the ministry of hospitality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. John 12: 20-33 2. Luke 2: 41-52 3. Matthew 7: 15-20 4. John 8: 31-42 5. John 8: 51 6. Jeremiah 20: 7 7. Ephesians 1: 9-10 	<p>Peter Druker once said “organisational culture eats strategy for breakfast” It’s difficult to change a culture. You can make your plans but the past affects the future. To challenge accepted practices and traditions and attitudes calls for a complete paradigm shift. Those who call for change need to believe it can happen and those who need to change need to be willing to. When it comes to spiritual change it is the same rule. The culture of self interest can only change by the power of the Spirit.</p> <p>The apostle Paul wrote if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old life passes away and everything becomes new. The Gospel invites us to turn away from a culture of individualism to a culture of community. The present culture that we live in values, as an inviolable principle, the right of the individual to choose. The Gospel invites the individual to choose in such away that the whole community benefits from our choosing. It is a call to put the other at the centre of our decision making. It is a call to die to self and live for Christ. This week we will reflect upon some spiritual practices and principles that will help us live out Gospel culture.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shaped around the hospitality of the Cross - an invitation to healing and reconciliation for all. Sign of the new creation. Cross and resurrection are one event. (See also: Jeremiah 31: 31-34). 2. Words shaped by example. Look at the example of Jesus engaging with the hospitality of the temple. 3. Shaping the world around through acts of kindness. It is by the actions of our lives, it is the fruit of our living that draws out the truth. Jesus shaped the world because his actions were as one with his words. It is one thing to have a ‘head knowledge’ of theology and speak passionately of grace. It is only grace worked out in actions that changes the world around us. 4. Community shaped by the power of the Spirit of truth. We are living through a moment of time where truth is relative. Jesus invites his followers to a new way of being a community of truth. Facing the truth is often the beginning of healing and rehabilitation. Living the truth can be dangerous but it is also the basis of creating a lasting community. 5. Shaped for eternity. Truth is eternal. Jesus offers a new way to look at what it means to be human. The Gospel invites us to see the bigger picture. If our hearts are restless it is because we long for the assurance of eternity. We are people in search of our original blessing. 6. Living out the Gospel of Grace. The world cannot understand grace. Yet it is hard to resist grace when encountered. (See also John 10: 37-28 and Psalm: 18: 1-7.) 7. Shaped by God’s Mission - to gather all to himself. God’s mission is to reconcile the whole of creation to himself. The death of Jesus is God’s reconciling act of justice and mercy. We are called as we approach Holy Week to grasp the significance of the crucifixion. It is not a sentimental tug on your heart strings. It is a cosmic enactment of God’s plan to redeem his creation. It invites a response from everyone - ‘Father God you have found me and redeemed me!’

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25 March	The Communion of the Saints	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Isaiah 50: 4-9 2. Isaiah 42.: 1-9 and John 12: 1-8 3. Psalm 71: 1-14 4. Jeremiah. 18: 1-11 and Matthew 20: 17-28 5. I Corinthians 11: 23-26 6. Isaiah 53: 1- 12 7. John 19: 38-42 	<p>As we conclude our Lenten theme, entering Holy Week and anticipating Easter, we contemplate the Communion of Saints that has gone on before us. Through the week we encourage you to think about ancient and contemporary saints.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communion of the Humble. What it means to be part of the Communion of the Saints. It is through the sufferings of Christ that we glimpse the glory (see also: John 12: 12-16 and Philipians 2: 5-11). He humbled himself and God glorified him. From a donkey - to a cross - to a throne. Leadership centred around humility and empathy reflects the nature of God. We are called to follow the example of Christ. 2. Communion of the Generous. The generosity of God in the heart of a human. In Isaiah, Christians see the favour of God expressed in the Suffering Servant Jesus the Messiah. Justice and mercy meet at the cross. In John, Mary expresses her gratitude for she is the bruised reed and smouldering wick. Pray that we might be generous saints in communion expressing gratitude to God through our actions. 3. Communion of the Weak. It is in our weakness that we encounter the power of God. The Church is at its most powerful when it realises its total dependance upon God. Think of the weak who have confounded the mighty. (See also John 12: 27-36 and I Corinthians 1: 26-31). 4. Communion of the Broken. Being opened up to understand what it means to be totally open to God's will. To be willing to be remade, shaped, by the will of the potter. In Matthew, Jesus explains the cost of being a servant leader. True greatness is not found in being served but by being the one who is willing to serve. True service requires our wills to be broken. 5. Communion of the Redeemed. Being brought back around the table of redemption. We are invited to consider what is meant by the hospitality of the cross. Think what it means to be part of the great company of saints gathered around the table. This is true communion. (See also: John 13: 1-17, 31-35 and Exodus 12: 1-4, 11-14). 6. Communion of the Rejected. Jesus stands with those who know the pain and hurt of rejection. Today we are invited to the place of desolation, rejection and shame. The place where we encounter our own personal need of forgiveness and redemption. When we discover the hope that comes from a Communion of Rejection. (See also Psalm 22, John 18: 1-18). 7. Communion of the Secret Believers and Doubters. The reality of following Jesus, with its fears and challenges. It is truly a mind blowing idea we are invited to believe. God has become one of us, God in Jesus Christ has opened a way in which heaven can touch earth. Isaiah 55 reminds us that as high as the heavens are above the earth so is the distance between the mind of God and the frail understanding of the human thought process. Yet God has reduced himself to declare his love for his creation in Jesus Christ. He has become the new Adam. (See also Lamentations 3: 1-9 and Job 14. 1-14).