

Sanctuary First

A PLACE TO BE

Lent: Heaven Touching Earth *Part 1* (Feb 11 - March 03 2018)

During the season of Lent we are going to challenge the strict boundaries that we draw between earth and heaven, and between the physical and spiritual. We are going to engage with the rich tradition of Celtic Christianity that doesn't divide things so starkly, and that can help us to spot the spiritual in the everyday, woven into the fabric of our existence. We will look at the increasing popularity of ideas such as wellbeing, mindfulness, spirituality and holistic ways of thinking about health - physical, mental and emotional.

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 to embrace a more inclusive, welcoming, and grace filled Christianity.

It is our hope that while reading scripture and praying together as the Sanctuary First community, that we might discover new models of church that will be invaluable to all of us as we seek to create a living expression of Christ's body here online. While many no longer attend church, a great number of former church members still describe themselves as Christians and an ever increasing number of people are exploring spirituality in new (or actually very old) ways through music, personal reflection, and discussion groups - or through their commitment to justice and equality in our world.

So over this time of reflection, let's embrace everyday spirituality, discovering the fantastic in the ordinary, keeping watch for moments when heaven touches earth...

Date	Subtheme	Readings	Notes
11 Feb *Ash Wednesday is 14 Feb	Dust need not be grey <i>Discovering God's promises through the times of pain.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Genesis 9: 8-17 Psalm 15: 1-9 Deuteronomy 30: 15-20 1 Peter 3: 18-22 Luke 9: 18-25 Matthew 9: 10-13 Isaiah 58: 9b-14 	<p>We have been inspired by CrossReach's Grey Cake initiative. Using a grey cake - with hidden rainbow layers inside - as an object lesson, we can discover hidden glory beneath our everyday cares and anxieties. We may at times feel our vulnerability, and rightly so for dust we are and to dust we will return, yet God has placed hidden treasure in the jars of clay.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Covered by a covenant of blessing, symbolised in the rainbow. Being 'at home' with God. Heaven and earth are called to witness the promise of God. Rainbow dust.... In our baptism heaven touches earth and the angels wonder. God longs for life to be filled with fruitfulness. Lose your life and save it! Sinners often more honest than the self righteous. The mercy and compassion of Jesus to the sinner God longs for justice for the poor, the marginalised, and those suffering.

Date	Subtheme	Readings	Notes
18 Feb	Blessings and trials <i>Rediscovering Celtic Spirituality</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mark 1:9-15 2. Leviticus 19: 1-2, 11-18 3. Isaiah 55: 6-11 4. Matthew 6: 7-15. 5. Matthew 7: 7-12 6. Psalm 130 7. John 15: 1-5 	<p>A rediscovery of Celtic Spirituality has brought about a greater understanding of the biblical importance placed upon blessings, trials, and even curses. Explore the sustaining blessing of God on Jesus. The dove illustrates that he is accepted and loved. This word of God sustains him in the desert. He succeeds.</p> <p>Thinking also about the countercultural Cycle of Grace (acceptance leading to worth to achievement) vs the mainstream Cycle of Works (achievement leading to worth leading to acceptance).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Blessings fall on the beloved Son. See how Jesus embraces the signs and symbol of baptism that go on to sustain him as he faces the wilderness experience. 2. When heaven touches earth goodness and kindness flows to the poor and needy. The signs of the Kingdom are hospitality and kindness, open homes and open hearts. See also Matthew 25: 31-46. 3. Look to the Father in Heaven. The wonderful grace of God waiting to pour blessings on those who least expect them. 4. The Lord's prayer - an amazing insight into heaven touching earth. 5. Ask and it will be given. Blessing comes from expectation. Sometimes it is in asking we find a new confidence and that is what God wanted all along. See also Psalm 138. 6. Repentance means turning away from evil. God blesses those who do so with forgiveness. However we must not take God's grace for granted. See also Ezekiel 18: 21-28. 7. To know complete Joy! God has created us in order that we might truly enjoy the abundance of his creation and enjoy life itself. Worth also looking at the general 'Prayer of thanksgiving' in the Book of Common Order.

Date	Subtheme	Readings	Notes
25 Feb	<p>A new rhythm for living</p> <p><i>A response of faith</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16 2. Luke 6: 27-38 3. Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20 4. Matthew 20:17-28 5. Jeremiah 17: 5-10 6. Genesis 37: 3-4, 12-28 7. Luke 15: 11-32 	<p>Understanding the rhythm of Creation becomes a template to begin to consider the rhythms of emotions and intellectual responses involved in seeking to know and encounter God.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Rhythm of Faith. We encounter the rhythm of faith - believing against the odds and then encountering the extravagant grace of God. See also Romans 4: 13-25 2. The Rhythm of Forgiveness. The rhythm is to love, do good, and bless and live generously. Your life will echo the living God. See also Daniel 9: 3-10. 3. The Rhythm of Repentance. The rhythm of repentance calls for humility and an acknowledgement of our personal sinfulness. It is a painful experience to admit to our own helplessness. When we begin to see heaven as our home and our Father in heaven touching earth through Jesus - the light shines into our darkness highlighting our neediness. See also Matthew 23: 1-12. 4. The Rhythm of Repentance Part II. True greatness is found in the life of a servant. A willingness that says 'not my will but thine be done'. Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me, see Jeremiah 18:1-11. 5. The Rhythm of Blessedness, Keep good company, don't be cynical, meditate on Scripture. Life may not be easy but it will be fulfilled. See also Luke 16:19-32. 6. The Rhythm of Rebellion and Redemption. The story of Joseph is one of deceit and rebellion culminating in redemption. It reflects the story of the human heart. Often the rejected ones become the key players in the life stories of so many people. When heaven touches earth no one is beyond redemption. See also: Psalm 105: 16-22 and Matthew 21: 33-43. 7. The Rhythm of Rebellion and Redemption Part II. The greatest story of all - it reveals the heart of God reaching out to his rebel children. Heaven touching earth is all about the story of grace. Forgiveness is at the heart of the message. See also: Micah 7: 14-15, 18-20.