



Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020

"Crossing Places"

Gathering

Welcome

DS Summers

Call to Worship (Based on Psalm 66:1-12; 19-20)

The Rev. Chad Hrbek

Leader: Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.

People: Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

Leader: All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.

People: Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.

Leader: There we rejoiced in him, who rules by his might for ever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations— let the rebellious not exalt themselves.

People: Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

Leader: For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water...

People: yet you have brought us out to a spacious place. But truly God has listened, and has given heed to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.

Opening Prayer (all pray)

**Loving God,
in whom we live and move and have our being,
help us to choose life in you,
that we may keep the commands of Jesus
follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit,
and witness to the hope that is within us,**

sharing Christ's love in the world. Amen.

Special Music

The Rev. Robert Schoeman

Proclamation and Response

Prayer for Illumination

Mrs. Melanie Melester

Come Holy Spirit, our helper and advocate:
Open our hearts and minds this day,
Entice us with your presence.
Spark us with a word of life —
A message that we may share with others
As we seek to live Christ's love in the world.
All this we ask in the name of God,
Who creates, redeems, and sustains us. **Amen.**

Epistle Lesson

1 Peter 3:13-22ⁱ

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Gospel Lesson

John 14:15-21ⁱⁱ

[Jesus said]

If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Leader: The Word of God for the people of God.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

The Message

“Crossing Places”

The Rev. Dr. Steven J. Summers

Take Off



I've always appreciated attributes of Celtic Spirituality and the elements of spiritual formation in the Celtic expressions of Christianity through many centuries.

So much so, in fact, that a few years ago Sallie, my spouse, and Sarah, my youngest daughter, went to Ireland for a couple of weeks to celebrate Sarah's seven years at William and Mary for two degrees and licensure as a School Psychologist. It was planned as a typical vacation, but ended up being quite a spiritual adventure for all of us. After we returned, I wrote a sermon series about our adventure and Celtic Spirituality.

There's something about the deep presence of Celtic Spirituality that has withstood the challenges of centuries, that has risen above the cultural shifts of the day. That's what I'd like to explore for a few minutes, especially in light of our current Pandemic challenges.

Imagine for a moment that we are all on a pilgrimage into Celtic Spirituality, in this pilgrimage we would look at how God gives us unique opportunities for passages in our lives... passages from one spiritual place to another, even deeper place.

Let us pray.

Challenge

The Celtic Christian holds a vision of life that has what is known as “crossing places” or physical places wherein we are at a divine threshold in time in our faith journey.



They come to us represented in different physical forms like this 350-year-old bridge that we encountered in Ballycastle on the North coast of Ireland.



Or the *Giant's Causeway* that opens up pathways to places that have been inaccessible in Bushmills.

The Celt's understood these natural phenomena to represent a Spiritual reality for us... that God gifts us with special passages in life — passages or thresholds of time and space when we have a Holy opportunity to move the spiritual ball in our lives... made possible by God's grace.

To move from here to there.

We can move from fear to courage — if we cross over that threshold.

We can move from doubt to faith — if we cross over that threshold.

We can move from brokenness to healing — if we cross over that threshold.

We can move from sin to righteousness — if we cross over that threshold.

We can move from disharmony to unity — if we cross over that threshold.

We can move from our wills to the will of God for us — if we cross over that threshold.

We can move from our pride and egos to a place of humility and divine submission — if we cross over that threshold.

We can move from allowing a pandemic to paralyze us to seeing a pandemic as a means of reaching others for Jesus and being a community of HOPE — if we cross over that threshold.

Indeed, we can move from the physical quarantine and social distancing required by a pandemic to a spiritual revival and deeper presence of discipleship with Jesus — *if we cross over that threshold.*

In short, we can all move from the world's status quo to the fulfilling of the KOG — *if we cross over that threshold... if we embrace crossing places.*

Exegesis

The gospel words of Jesus you just heard follows Jesus' instructions to his disciples about how to live without his physical presence once he ascended to his Father. It is known as the Farwell Discourse of Jesus.

It about how they could embrace a crossing place from being with Jesus to being empowered by the Holy Spirit for the birth of Christ's Church, under the most adverse of circumstances.

His words help us to understand how to live and serve as the people of God, especially under challenging times.



Jesus shared his words in a time of complexity: the empire, strong and powerful rulers, oppression, fear, resource shortages, estrangement, a lack of a sense of community, tension, brokenness, financial oppression, and even cultural chaos.

I don't think it's a stretch to make parallels between that environment and the stressors and unknowns we are dealing with now in this pandemic.

But Jesus doesn't want our lives to shaped by such forces that seem like a mess of puzzle pieces.

In this challenging place for his disciples, who were most likely crippled by fear from all that was going on coupled with the reality that Jesus would soon be ascending to God, he offers them, and us, an astounding statement,

"If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

Did you hear that, "If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

Yea right, some of you make be saying in your heart. For real, ANYTHING????

But Jesus isn't offering cheap grace or a pass on struggles in life, like a genie in a bottle with three wishes to grant.

That "I will do it" Jesus promise is coupled with a, what I will call conditional ethic of steadfast love unmerited grace: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Earlier in John Jesus gave them this overarching eternal ethic: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

They, and us, **MUST** emulate the transformative love of Christ that is a crossing place to love.

As Professor Linda Clader states, "Jesus was most certainly a force on the move. Think of the meals with outcasts and sinners. Think of the money changers in the Temple. Think of the healings and the preaching, the travels between Galilee and Jerusalem. The story of Jesus is a story not of private feelings and comfort, but of action." iii

SO, beloved, what do we learn from Jesus' words and the Celtic notion of crossing places to help us navigate this season of pandemic?

Application



Crossing over to new opportunities in God requires us to fully surrender ourselves to God.

Crossing over a passage to a deeper faith necessarily requires us to let go of the places and things in which we **TRY** to find security in this world.

We have to trust ourselves to the One who holds out his hand and says "trust me" - it's not about your re-sources; it's all about the **SOURCE**. Trust in the one who created the stars and set them in motion.

The One who sheds light in the darkness and breathes life into death.

As the epistle of Peter states, "Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you...."

We have to trust ourselves to Jesus; to what is he calling you today? What passage is waiting for your first step, especially because we are in the midst of this troubling season?

Maybe your passage is in the form of an outward act of kindness with a simple call to a lonely person, or maybe it's an inward journey of renewed spiritual commitment; maybe it is a call to radical generosity as our churches are struggling financially right now with the closure of our buildings... whatever it is as Celtic Scholar Margaret Silf states,

"we will always lead to those moments or stages in our lives when we have to surrender something of the securities of the past, and **step out into something new.**"^{iv}

Application Challenge

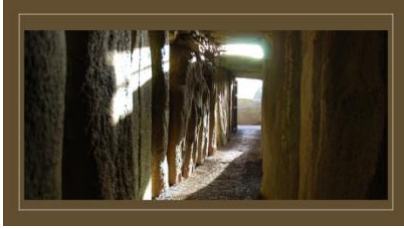


The Christian journey is full of passageways to new opportunities for serving, lifelong learning, and influencing others in their faith journey. [REPEAT]
(connect Conference Vision)



In Ireland's Ancient East, there's a Stone Age monument known as Newgrange. It's older than Stonehenge or the pyramids. Newgrange is a circular one-acre mound with a stone passageway and burial chambers inside.

On our trip Sallie, Sarah and I felt the sacredness of the inner chamber as we stood there with 17 other people from around the world and contemplated all that had taken place in that room for 5000 years.



But here's a really fascinating thing about Newgrange: in the late 1960's archeologists discovered that on the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, a single shaft of light enters a perfectly positioned window at Newgrange and it lights up the 60-foot pitch black corridor for 17 minutes once a year. The bones in that inner chamber were illuminated thousands of years ago and the community was reminded that the days would be longer and longer and it would soon be time to plant.

How the ancients knew to do this engineering is a great mystery to scholars.

Landing

Each year Newgrange has a lottery and 60 people win the opportunity to jam themselves into that chamber for 5 cold mornings in December. There were over 30,000 entries last year. If they are lucky and it's not cloudy, they can experience what has taken place for over 5000 years in that chamber.

The Good News for us this morning is that there is no lottery needed for the Light that God shines on your pathway.

And it's not 17 minutes once a year; it's every minute throughout the year.

No virus, nor anything else in all of creation, can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus; this passage is open and full of God's Light and the hands of Christ that reach out for you. Remember... this is the season of Easter; the power of God rolled that stone away and defeated death itself!

Won't you say yes to God and take the next step in your faith journey?



you to God."

Jesus makes you a promise right now: "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." The Holy Spirit is in you and with you this very minute. As the Epistle reading states, "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God." **"... in order to bring**

I challenge you to move from the world's worry and anxieties to the fulfilling of the Kingdom of God in your life as you cross over that threshold God holds out for you.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.



Thanksgiving for Faithfulness

The Pastoral Prayer

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord who listens and gives heed to our prayers.

People: We praise and bless you, our true and loving God.

The leader offers petitions ending with "Lord, in your mercy"

The people respond, "Receive our prayer."

Sending Forth

Benediction and Blessing

May God, who creates, redeems, and sustains,
Keep you steadfast in faith, buoyant in hope, and abounding in love.
And the blessing of God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Be among you and remain with you always.
Go in peace. **Amen.**^v



ⁱ NRSV

ⁱⁱ NRSV

ⁱⁱⁱ (Bartlett, 2010, p. 493)

^{iv} (Silf, 2001, p. 137)

^v (Kimberly Bracken Long, 2013, p. 157ff) Adaptation of: The Opening Prayer, Prayer for Illumination, Pastoral Prayer, and Benediction

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