

Passages: Blessings for Special Moments”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for First UMC, Grand Junction, Sunday, July 26, 2020

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ

website: www.fumcgj.org/sermons-2/

Scripture Texts:

Luke 1:57-58, 67-70 & Psalm 42:4 [NLT]

OPENING

(*The remarkable story of Newgrange in County Meath, Ireland. After telling the story, play this video from beginning to end:*)

(*https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=156&v=P6XAFJ_FdOA&feature=emb_title*)

(*The significance is the role that rituals play – especially annual rituals like this one – in reminding us of important passages as life unfolds and sweeps us along in its fleeting way.*)

TO THE SCRIPTURES

This finds powerful expression in the Scripture texts for today, which were just read for us. (*Unpack these a bit – see Scripture reading file.*)

SERMON THOUGHTS

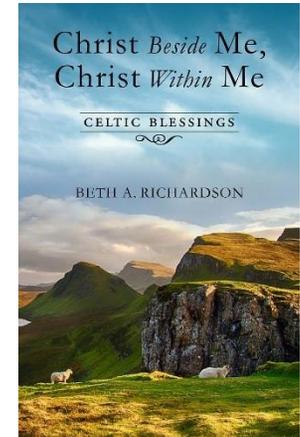
Rearranging the order a bit...we’re going to look at Beth’s poems speaking to rites of passage before we look at the Celtic spiritual practices for this week.

I. Beth Richardson and *Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me*

→ Ideas around Beth’s
“Bless to me ___” prayers

→ The list for this segment:
Passages. There are “Bless to me ___” prayers for

- ✓ *A Child is Coming*
- ✓ *Blessing for a New Baby*
- ✓ *First Day of School*
- ✓ Birthday
- ✓ After the Death of a Pet
- ✓ Graduation
- ✓ For a Home
- ✓ Marriage
- ✓ A Leaving



A Child is Coming (*Tie to Scripture AND to the experience of all of us, whether we have carried children or not. Especially meaningful for me as this has been a period of loss through death for our congregation.*)

Bless you,

And bless this one who grows within you,
This miracle of Creation.

Knit together with dust
From a thousand stars,
With clay from faraway places,
And cells descended from the dawn of life,
Child of yours, child of Creation.
Walk slowly through these days,
Savoring this holy time.

Live gently in this space
Of growth and new life
Inside you, beside you, around you.
Thanks be to the One who created all,
Who created you,
Who created the life you nurture.
You are beloved.
You are chosen.
You are blessed.

*Blessing for a New Baby (*Tie to Scripture AND
to the experience of all of us, truly*)*

Welcome to the world, little one!
We have been waiting for you
With hope and prayers.
And now you are here.
You are a miracle child,
Knit together in your mother's womb.
Formed in the image of Creation –
Of stars and planets,
Of trees and flowers,
Of humans and creatures,
Of the Creator who gave you life.
Beloved child of your parents,
Beloved child of your family,
Beloved child of God.
Welcome!

*First Day of School (*Very poignant for our
times*)*

Bless this day of new beginnings.
Bless this lunch box, this backpack,
These new supplies: pencils or crayons, books or
computer.
Bless the school and all who work there:
Principals, food service workers,
Those who teach and those who clean.
Bless this learner, beloved of God.
Bless head and heart, hands and feet.
Prepare him for the work of learning.
Protect her as she walks the way to knowledge.
Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit,
Be in the teaching and in the learning,
Be in the traveling and in the friending.
Be in this one you have created
As this journey begins.

II. The Heart of Celtic Spirituality: Spiritual Practices
[Source: U.S. Catholic. <https://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201905/12-celtic-spiritual-practices-celebrate-god-our-world-31727>]

Refresher from last week (“cumulative force” of the series):

- *Perigrinatio pro Christo*
- Marking Seasonal Cycles

For this week:

Dreams

In ancient times dreams were respected as signs from God. Dreams play a significant role in scripture, with

guidance and direction often arriving in these night visions.

Scripture meditation

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you."

—Matthew 2:13

There's –

- ✓ Jacob's dream of a staircase from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending
- ✓ Joseph, whose story is told in the last half of Genesis
- ✓ Daniel's dream of the four beasts, and
- ✓ The four separate dreams Joseph, the father of Jesus, concerning Jesus' early life and family.

These are all notable examples from Scripture.

Many Irish saints had meaningful dreams as well. Legend says St. Patrick had a dream in which he was visited by an angel who encouraged him to flee his captivity in Ireland and helped arrange a miraculous escape. He later had another dream in which he heard the Irish people calling out to him to return to the land of his enslavement and help Christianity flourish.

Solitude and Silence

The desert tradition profoundly influenced the Celtic monks. While many monks were unable to go to the literal desert, they sought out the wild edges and solitary places of wilderness.

There are many sacred places in Ireland and Wales with the word *dysert* or *disert* in the name. This is the Irish word for *desert* and refers to a place of solitude and silence, a retreat for those who long for a more intimate encounter with God and where attention can be cultivated with few distractions.

There are many stories of Irish monks who lived as hermits for a time, including Sts. Colman and Kevin, who both lived in caves and had animals as their companions.

Scripture meditation

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

—Mark 1:35

CONCLUSION

In daily life: *Dreams*

One of the best ways to remember your dreams is to place a journal and pen by your bed at night and then ask God for a dream before sleep. Even if you awaken with only a fragment or a feeling, record that upon waking. Reflect upon that, especially if there are patterns. (*Tell the humorous story – anonymously, of course – of Jan Reece's dream of her deceased husband's unfaithfulness and her desire to get back to sleep and give him the "what for"! Permission from Jan?*)

In daily life: *Solitude and Silence*

Begin by making a commitment to spending 5–10 minutes each day in silence. Turn off any notifications from your phone or computer and ask others in your house not to disturb you. Then extend this by finding a whole morning or afternoon to go to a nearby retreat center or monastery and listen deeply to the sacred stirrings within.

Let us pray...