

I didn't quite need Ancestry.com to tell me that I have strong roots in Ireland and Scotland, my mother's maiden name ties us to Clan McPherson from the Scottish highlands and a different branch of the family tree came to America and settled in Iowa during the Irish potato famine. And of course the red hair and pale skin are good giveaways too. So I've always had a particular fondness for the Celtic roots of our Christian tradition that come from there. And I believe, in the times we are living in, those roots might offer us a lot of wisdom.

In those western parts of the British Isles, where culturally Celtic peoples predominated, the primary influence on Christian practices and beliefs there wasn't Roman, but Celtic spirituality that respected women's gifts, felt spiritually linked to creation, and celebrated God through all the senses. And Celtic spirituality still informs the Episcopal church through many deep currents we may not always be consciously aware of, but that perhaps the Holy Spirit could be drawing to the surface for us again.

One of the foundational features of Celtic spirituality is the belief and practice that all beings, all life, truly is sacred. We absolutely do recognize the brokenness and violence—the sin—that is endemic throughout human experience. Still, we believe the very first thing that God said about life and all of creation, including human life, in our scriptures: that it was all “very good.”

What is more challenging sometimes to remember is that good encompasses both light AND darkness as God created them. Light and dark feature prominently in our readings today – and in some parts of western Christianity, we are finally coming to understand the various ways that the Bible's use of light and dark imagery has been coopted in our history and used as a tool to theologically justify racist atrocities such as slavery and apartheid. But in the roots of the Celtic tradition, the rhythm of light and dark are both part of the flow of the seasons – not a binary - something to be divided, one from another, with one deemed good and pure and the other evil.

One of the resolutions we passed at General Convention last summer was to take an in-depth look at the ways our colonial and imperial past is still carried forth in our prayers, practices and music, all rooted in some of the earliest Christian writings. That symbolic shift also affected Christian imagery, as Jesus, Mary, the saints, and the angels have in so many places in our world all ended up transformed into pale white Europeans, reflecting the skin of Christian colonizers.

How many songs, prayers, pieces of art, can you think of where white is used to express purity and goodness, while black expresses the diabolical and evil? The letter to the Ephesians we heard today urges us to live as children of the light and reject the unfruitful works of the darkness.

And while most normative in our collective consciousness is the reduction of the Divine to white and bright imagery, we cannot forget that also present in our scriptures are places where darkness is also a positive symbol for God. Places where God knows us in the darkness of the womb, is present in the life within the seed buried deep in the earth. Where God rests in the clouds, in the shadows, in the storms, and covers the people in God's good, restorative shade. In the beginning God separates the light from the dark, but BOTH are divine and good.

AND so are all the in-between places – deep in Celtic spirituality is an appreciation for the threshold spaces. The liminal and thin spaces, the times and locations when the veil between the worlds is the most permeable, the times that aren't quite night and aren't quite day. The spiritual practice of crossing those thresholds that define our places of comfort and belonging, in order to discover broader perspectives and deeper places of being, is a particularly Celtic practice. Unlike the more authoritarian Roman tradition, Celtic Christianity encouraged all kinds of exploration and experiences that pushed people beyond the comfortable and known and that is part of why it was able to hold within it an incredibly diverse range of theologies and practices. What could we learn from how they were able to do that?

As a parish, you are in a threshold moment as you transition from one season of leadership to another. And, one of the things you will hear if you join us for coffee after church is that the survey you just took as part of that process reveals that you have a really diverse range of theological perspectives here at Trinity. In time in our culture where it would be so easy to divide into firm camps around those things – what might the Holy Spirit be calling you to witness to those around you about how to engage and learn from each other in love – even across differing and deeply held beliefs?

Each of our readings today feature the illuminating work of God that raises up leaders and witnesses to see with clearer vision. And there's an important difference between the man that was born blind in our gospel story and the others – he knew he was blind and that now he could see – not just physically but spiritually. The others couldn't see their blindness. The story makes it clear that it has nothing really to do with the quality of our actual vision, but everything to do with how we so often see God, other people, an events not as THEY are but through the limited lens of who WE are. As we look more deeply and honestly at our own history as a nation, and at our lives and the people, at the places and events that have shaped and formed us – as we interrogate the pieces of our Christian narrative and history that have done great harm - I do believe our hearts can be opened to see more clearly a new way forward in love.

We need God and we need each other to help us enable clearer vision, to show us where we have been blind to others experiences and blind to our own biases and fears. It is God who opens us to see with the eyes of our heart, who helps us expose our human error for what it is and generate life amidst death. I had a seminary professor who called that kind of vision our Gospel eyes.

Those Gospel eyes are sorely needed right now. One of the most powerful tools for maintaining oppression and injustice is to refuse to see or deny that those injustices even exist. But our God reveals all of it. God sees the unjust and unfruitful works of this world, and

empowers us to expose them as we begin to see them more clearly and as we open our hearts to love each other as God loves.

In Celtic Christian wisdom and spirituality, to adore the divine is to truly see and love the human that God has put in front of us, to adore heaven is to fully see and cherish and honor the earth.

May God help us all to use this Lenten time to see more clearly and love more deeply, both ourselves and all of God's creation beyond any binaries we may artificially create. And may God richly bless you here at Trinity in this liminal, threshold time of discernment, to see with Gospel eyes the work ahead for this next season of your life together. Amen.

- The Rev. Cn. Meg Wagner