

**"A Way to Live" :**  
**Celtic Christian Spirituality for C21 People**  
***Paul John Martin***

**Outline for 3 Sessions — St. Bede's, September 2024**

- \* Who were the Celts?**
- \* 10 'Headlines' about their take on following Christ.**
- \* A Theology to Dance**
- \* The Aidan Way**
- \* Monks on Main Street, Nuns on the 'net.**
- \* The Church that is Coming : Oases in the Desert**

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**Session 1 — Meet the Celtic Saints**

**Opening Worship: Saint Aidan's Prayer for Lindisfarne.**

**"Here be the peace of those who do your sacred will.  
Here be the praise of God by night and day.  
Here be the place where strong ones serve the weakest.  
Here be a sight of Christ's most gentle way.  
Here be the strength of prophets righting greed and wrong.  
Here be the green of land that's tilled with love.  
Here be the soil of holy lives maturing.  
Here be a people one with all the saints above."**

**Book to Highlight : "Water from an Ancient Well" McIntosh**

**Who were the Celts?**

- A group of separate nations with a shared culture
- Prominent in Europe through the 1000 years BCE

*If you are of European descent, you will have some Celtic DNA. As we look into their faith and lives, if you have African, Latin, or Native American descent, let us know what rings bells for you.*

- Advanced culture, but routed by the Romans, and pushed to the fringes
- Fierce warriors, became fierce (but peaceful) followers of Christ
- Family and tribe central
- Their culture was very open to the gospel - and in ways that ring bells for us
- Lovers of beauty, symbol, the power of the word and story

### **The Celts as Christians —**

- Never a separate church — saw themselves as loyal members of the one church based in Rome
- Heavily influenced by other 'fringers,' especially the Desert Fathers and Mothers
- Warriors - daring all for God, but without the violence. Martyrdoms - Red, Green, and White

### **How they speak to me and many in C21:**

- A lifestyle that weaves together all the strains of the faith, taking us much closer to the church of the apostles.
- Because the Celts believed God is revealed in creation as well as scripture, concern for the environment was hard-wired into their faith.
- Many, though not all, treated women as full partners in life and ministry.
- Their evangelism was peaceful and based on the attraction of whole, caring lives.
- They were held and nurtured in committed communities very different from the Roman 'parish' system we still have today, 500 years after the Reformation. 'Parish' here means that the local church revolves around a fixed sanctuary and a pastor/priest/minister.
- They were very wise in 'baptizing' parts of their culture that gibed with the gospel, and discarding what didn't. We who are inspired by them are likewise not New Age pagans.
- A Way of Life that frames my efforts to live every day in the Way of Jesus.
- Kindred spirits who, though separated by distance, have become my 'tribe.'

## **10 'Headlines' about their Faith**

### 1 God in Trinity

A] God Over All

"Listening for the Heartbeat of God"

More comfortable with mystery than neat theology

B] Christ the Victor

Cosmic, Conqueror, Companion

C] The Wild Goose

Mighty Spirit of Power

### 2 Thinking with the Emotions

"An integrity of spirit deeper than rational thought"

How to become the Body of Christ for real.

### 3 Two Sacred 'Books'

Creation and Scripture

Worshipped God in the Natural world, *not* Nature itself

### 4 Life as Pilgrimage

"A pilgrimage from which we shall not return"

Looking for your 'Place of Resurrection.' - Stability vs. Leaving Home

White and Green Martyrdoms

### 5 Forgiveness and Penance

Medicine for the Soul

### 6 God in the Everyday

Saints as Companions

### 7 Gathered in Communities, not Parishes

Join me as we visit a Celtic 'monastic community'

The Welcoming Family of God

8 The Draw of Caring Lives

Evangelism of Witness, Listening and Presence

Some of the most successful cross-cultural evangelism ever

9 Praise and Prayer

Poetry and Images

Loved the Psalms

10 The "Veil thin as Gossamer" (George MacLeod)

Death and Life, Angels and Demons

'Thin' places

And just in passing, some 'Page 7' Headlines!

11 The Power of the Word - Prophecy, Miracles and Healing

12 Scripture - Living Words

The Peacock's Tail Feathers

13 Creativity and Imagination - Love of the arts, beauty.

14 The Role of Women -

Many (not all) accepted women as equals in life and ministry, as did Celtic society and law

15 Spiritual Battle

Not a popular image now, but speaks to a reality

16 The Soul Friend

The one to whom you dare open your life

## Session 2 — A Theology to Dance

**Books:**     **"Living the Celtic Way"**  
                  **"Anam Cara"**

**Bradley**  
**O'Donohue**

First, what we must NOT do at any cost:

We must not worship old things as substitutes for eternal things, as Richard Rohr has said.<sup>1</sup>

So, what can we take forward with us, drawing 'Water from an Ancient Well?'

"Say *Friend* and Enter"

- To enter their faith, and dance.

This is a theology that needs to be danced.

It is not about what to believe, but how to believe;

not about creeds, but contemplation;

not about searching for God,

but acknowledging God is closer than our own breath;

not about what makes me feel fulfilled,

but what opens the door of my heart to God;

not about a direct path, but the infinity and patterns of the Celtic knot.

- A rich and whole theology.

Holistic, creation-friendly.

Embraces all the strands of Christian faith.

Weaves together love of creation with love of God's Word written and made human.

- Life as Journey.

"Live life as a Pilgrimage from which we shall not return."

Venturing out vs. stability.

Seeking your "Place of Resurrection."

- Lively, image-laden worship.

Taken from popular tradition, though it is not clear how far back that goes.

Found in new prayers and hymns, eg. The Wild Goose Group (Iona).

Worship at the High Crosses; 'Forest Church.'

- Intentional Discipleship

Church, family, society, school no longer support living daily as disciples.

We need a Way of Life that we can easily apply in our lives.

Monastic values — “Monks on Main Street, Nuns on the Net.”

- Following a Way of Life

Like a good physical fitness plan for the spirit.

Challenging, but flexible and adaptable, and one we can grow into.

Once internalized, our Way simplifies and focuses our life every day.

- Communities rather than Churches.

‘Villages of God’ or ‘Colonies of Heaven.’

Rome’s model for the local church was the Empire’s Civil Service;

the Celts started from what they knew: the extended family.

We need a way to rebirth the Celtic Monastic Communities.

Hospitality a core value.

“The fire is burning bright on the hearth, draw in as near as you are ready to come.”

From which follows:

- Non-Threatening Evangelism (Hunter)

“Radical Welcome, Changing Lives.”

Evangelism of deep hospitality, humbly serving the people, and caring presence and witness.

Iona and Lindisfarne - isolated, but on main travel routes.

Parables of contemplative and community; prayer and action; mission and retreat

Often sought out those on the margins of society.

“Believe, Belong, Behave” now becoming “Behave, Belong, Believe.”

- A Soulfriend.

A mature Christian friend to whom I open up my life.

Vital: to have a soulfriend is the only absolute requirement to join the Community of Aidan and Hilda.

The Sponsor in a 12-step program is somewhat similar

### Session 3 — Monks on Main Street, Nuns on the 'net.

**Books: "A Way of Life for the 3rd Millennium" Simpson**  
**"Followers of the Way" Reed**

#### How we Adapt the 3 Great Monastic Vows

Poverty	Simplicity
Chastity	Purity in all Relationships
Obedience	Openness to your Soulfriend (whom you choose)

#### 10-point Way of Life

***Community of Aidan and Hilda (USA)***  
**Waymark Summary and Daily Prayers**

- Lifelong Learning**      *Teach us from your Word and your World*  
Learning, not just Study!  
Always more to Learn along the Way  
Learn from Scripture, Celtic & other Saints,  
Creation, Experience
- Spiritual Journey with a Soulfriend**      *Companion us on our Journey of Life*  
Stability vs. Pilgrimage  
Look for your Place of Resurrection  
Penance — Medicine for the Soul  
Soulfriend: Companion  
"No soulfriend, no head!" (Brigid)  
How we follow the vow of Obedience
- A Rhythm of Prayer, Work and Re-Creation**      *Free us to Walk in your Rhythms*  
Live in Harmony with Creation  
Take control of your time, or someone else will!  
Prayer: If busy, little and often works  
Learn to use routine time, make space
- Overcome Evil with Good**

*Spur us to Life-Changing Prayer*

"No initiative to change what is wrong can succeed unless it begins with a Godward movement of the heart — and that is intercession." (Ray Simpson)

5      Simple Lifestyle

*Free us from all that Clutters*

Simple living affects all our life, not just money  
It asks different things of each of us  
Our attitude is colored by social pressure,  
and by our childhood experience

6      Care for Creation

*Cherish through us your Creation*

"This we know: We did not weave the web of life,  
we are part of it." (?Chief Seattle)  
"If you trample on the earth  
the earth will trample on you!" (Columbanus)  
Not pantheism, but *Panentheism*

7      Heal Wounded People and Places

*Heal through us what is Wounded*

We are called to be healers, but we cannot heal others  
until we are on the Way to healing ourselves  
Our first Mission Statement: "For the Healing of the Land"  
When founding a community, the Celts often prayed there  
for 40 days to drive out any evil

8      Be Open to God's Spirit

*Blow us to the Places on the Edge*

The Spirit is not given to us to help in our mission;  
we are called to help her in hers  
Being open to prophecy, healing, and other such gifts is  
part of the genesis of CA&H

9      Unity

*Weave together through us what is torn apart*



To the Celts, being part of the Body of Christ was not a  
cute image, but reality  
Ubuntu — I am because we are  
Aim for unity and love before doctrine

10 Mission

*Reach out through us*

*with Jesus and with Justice*

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for shalom,  
for they shall be filled."

The final goal is not all saved, but all creation made whole

**The Church that is Coming : Oases in the Desert**

A Way authentic to this land - what strands may that weave in?  
Native American  
African American  
Latinx American

**"A World made Whole."**

We need to go beyond our churches and dare to imagine a world  
where barriers go down,  
where God's love integrates and heals.

May the Christ who walks with wounded feet  
walk with us on the road;  
May the Christ who serves with wounded hands  
stretch out our hands to serve;  
May the Christ who loves with wounded heart  
open our hearts to love.

*Ray Simpson*