

Isaiah 43: 16-21

16Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,
17who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they
cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

18“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.

19Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I
will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

20The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in
the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people,

21the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

Phillipians 3:4b-14

If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a
Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, 6as to zeal a persecutor of the
church, as to righteousness under the law blameless. 7But whatever gain I had, I
counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8Indeed I count

everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my

Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse,

in order that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of
my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness

from God that depends on faith; 10that I may know him and the power of his
resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11that

if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12Not that I have already
obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because

Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13Brethren, I do not consider that I have made
it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to

what lies ahead, 14I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of
God in Christ Jesus.

John 12: 1-8

1Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom

Jesus had raised from the dead. 2There they made him a supper; Martha served,

and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. 3Mary took a pound of costly
ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her

hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. 4But Judas

Iscaiot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, 5“Why was

this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” 6This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. 7Jesus said, “Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. 8The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

Revised Standard Version of the Bible

The Celtic Way of Evangelism

This morning, my sermon is actually going to be a book report. Of this book: The Celtic Way of Evangelism, by George Hunter III- that I recently finished reading. I picked it up at the District training event back in January. One of the presentations I attended at the training also was based on this book, and I got a lot out of it.

St. Patrick's Day was a week ago, but I convinced Carol to let me talk about it this Sunday instead. Some of the prayers and responsive readings this morning are from the book, and I have chosen some Celtic and Gaelic music for the prelude and postlude.

Let me start by reading a passage from the first chapter of the book.

Pages 13-15 from book.

OK. So now you know more about St Patrick than you did before. But, so what? What does the story of St. Patrick have to do with you, and me, and church after 1500 years?

When St. Patrick arrived in Ireland, there were few if any Christians there. The Romans considered the Irish as barbarians - uncivilized, and probably impossible to civilize. Yet within Patrick's lifetime historians estimate that he founded around 700 churches and ordained 1000 priests. Thirty to forty of the estimated 150 tribes in Ireland became substantially Christian within Patrick's lifetime. Patrick's influence pretty much put an end to the slave trade in Ireland, and greatly lessened the intertribal warfare that had been their way of life for centuries. In Ireland alone there are 6000 place names that contain an element of the word Cill, the Gaelic word for church. Within a hundred years of St. Patrick arriving in Ireland, it had been totally transformed from a non-Christian to a Christian island.

But there's more. In 563 A.D. a group of Irish missionaries, led by Columba, left Ireland for an island off the coast of Scotland called Iona. Columba, eventually to become St. Columba, founded a monastery at Iona. Columba's mission was to bring Christianity to the Picts.

The Picts were the people that lived in what is now Scotland. They got the name from the Romans, because when they went into battle, they painted their faces. Pict comes from a Roman word meaning painted, the same word that became "picture" in English. The Romans considered the Picts to be as big a bunch of barbarians as the Irish. They wanted nothing to do with them. Even to the point of building a wall from one side of Scotland to the other - from sea to sea - to keep the Picts out of Roman England. Hadrian's wall, as it is known, is about 165 miles long and about 10 feet high, and is a major tourist attraction these days..

Now the Picts were a pretty scraggly bunch. If you've ever seen the movie Braveheart, starring Mel Gibson, then you have a pretty good picture of what they were like.

But Columba and his Irish priests thought that the Picts would make good Christians. And they were right. Using the same methods that Patrick had used in Ireland, Columba went among the Picts establishing monasteries, teaching, and ministering to the people. Other missionaries, possibly from England were also working in Scotland as well. Within a hundred years, Scotland was substantially Christian as well.

But it doesn't stop there. While Patrick and Columba were doing their thing in Ireland and Scotland, the Roman empire had finally finished collapsing. The Roman influence in England had declined, and with it the Christian church. After the Romans left, England was repeatedly invaded by Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and other Germanic people. These Anglo-Saxon people displaced the Britons already in England, pushing them into what is now Wales and Brittany in France.

In the year 633, Aidan left the island of Iona and established a monastery on the island of Lindisfarne off the northern coast of England. Like Columba before him, Aidan used his island monastery to establish a presence in England and begin the missionary work there. And like Columba, Aidan eventually became a saint. His group worked for over 90 years to bring Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons. At the same time Augustine was evangelizing southern England.

The point that the book makes - the reason that George Hunter wrote the book - is this: The same methods and ideas that saints Patrick, Columba, and Aiden used fifteen hundred years ago to reach non-Christians will work today to reach non-Christians.

So what are these methods of Patrick that George Hunter identifies that can work to reach the unchurched people of today's world?

One of the methods can be summed up with the phrase "belonging before believing". Another way of saying it is that Christianity "is better caught than taught." Patrick and his followers would go into a town or a village and set up a monastery. They would start doing things for people - teaching, healing, feeding, and so on. As the people interacted with Patrick's group, they would gradually learn Christianity from the words and deeds they heard and saw. As they gradually learned Christianity, they gradually became Christians. Eventually many of them would join Patrick's group

This method is different than what we generally think of as missionary work - that is, approaching people and trying to convince them to become Christians by logic and arguments and persuasion.

A related method that Patrick used is to practice hospitality toward people to reach them with the Gospel. Again, just doing things for people without attaching a message to it. A good example of this that you might relate to was the Pie Social we had here last month. We invited folks to come have a piece of pie. No message. No hard sell. Just hospitality - serving others.

Last week Carol and I watched a program on KUED about the Bingham Canyon copper mine and all the communities that used to be up the canyon from Copperton. In the course of the program, former residents told stories about what it was like to grow up in those towns. At one point, they talked about the Highland Boy Community House, a Methodist church in the community of Highland Boy. And Miss Ada Duhigg, who operated the Highland Boy Community House. As I remember, it was the only church mentioned in the program.

The Highland Boy Community House served as a community center for the children growing up there. It didn't matter whether you were Methodist or not,

everyone was welcome there. One of the persons in the program telling their recollections was Janie Montoya. Janie is no stranger to our church. She was one of the Silver Songbirds group that sang here a while back. I like one of her recollections. She said that when a miner would die, and they weren't a member of a church, and the other churches wouldn't do the funeral, Ada Duhigg was always there to do the funeral.

Ron Yengich is another former resident that shared his recollections of growing up in the canyon and spending time at the Highland Boy Community House with Ada Duhigg. You could tell from what he said that it meant a lot to him. And you can tell that he hasn't forgotten it from his continuing support of our church. Highland Boy Community House and Ada Duhigg are both excellent examples of the Celtic way of Evangelism.

In the book, George Hunter makes a point that Patrick, and Columba, and Aiden along with their followers adapted Christianity to the people that they were ministering to. They used the music, the language, the imagery, the traditions, and the culture of the people as the means to reach them, and as examples of God and Christ in the world around them. He contrasts this with the Roman church, which until the lifetime of most of us, required people to learn Latin to fully understand to words and meanings of the liturgies of the church. Many Christian hymns use words and music from Celtic culture. Carol's favorite hymn, "Be Thou my Vision" is just one example.

Just as the Christian Romans thought the Irish and Picts were unreachable, many modern Christians feel that their unchurched neighbors are beyond the reach of Christianity. Hunter disagrees and thinks that the same sorts of methods that Patrick used, when translated into today's culture, will work with people today. He goes into detail on the ways he thinks Celtic Christian methodology will work, and I think he is onto something.

If you have any interest in Celtic Christianity or in exploring ways of reaching the unchurched in our community, I would highly recommend reading *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*.