

The Celtic Way of Evangelism – Part 2

St Philip's Anglican Church
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Last Sunday we learnt a little about St Patrick and I said we would look further into this book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* by George G Hunter III which explores why St Patrick and his team evangelised Ireland in 2-3 generations when the Roman church of the time, with all its wealth, prestige and power, had given up the Irish as a lost cause. The Irish were viewed as barbarian, they had no written language, they went into battle naked, they lived in tribal communities, they had no central government.

But again I have overreached myself — you cannot sum up anything about the Irish in twelve minutes!

All I can do now is contrast the two models of evangelism. We might learn more about them another day.

The Roman model was to:

1. present the Christian message;
2. invite the people to decide to believe in Christ and become Christians; and
3. if they decided positively, then welcome them into the church and its fellowship.

The Celtic, St Patrick model, for reaching people was to:

1. first establish community with the people, then bring them into the fellowship of the Christian community of faith.
2. within this fellowship, the evangelists would engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship; and
3. in time, as the people discovered that they now believed, then invite them to commit.

Very simply it is belonging before believing.

We, at St Philips, will reflect on how we can get people to have a sense of belonging to us another day, but for now, Robin Shannon (the liturgical assistant), and I invite you to experience with us the most famous Irish Prayer, St Patrick's Breastplate.

Before we read it we might ask the questions: when was it written, and where does the name come from?

Scholars suggest it was written in the 8th century; so about 200 years after Patrick's death.

It is not clear where the name comes from, perhaps from the priestly garment worn over the chest in the temple, or more likely from Paul's reference to the whole armour of God, Ephesians 6.10-17

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of

righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Even if St Patrick did not actually write this prayer, he certainly would have known about Paul's words.

Whatever its origin, what this prayer offers us is an example of many of the characteristics which are distinctive to the Celtic approach and understanding of the Christian faith, and how this is expressed in liturgy and prayer. Let us listen to Robin as he reads it :

<http://stphilipsoconnor.org.au/sermons/St Patrick's Breastplate> p1.pdf

<http://stphilipsoconnor.org.au/sermons/St Patrick's Breastplate> p2.pdf