

REMAINING CHRISTIAN

Psalm 19:1-14; Mark 8:27-38

Corrymeela Community Weekend

3 October 2021

Here we are, together this weekend, as a community. Many of us up here at a place that means so much to us to so many. Reconnecting in old and new ways (learning how new technological marvels work or don't), and coming together to discuss yet again who we are as a community. This community trying to live out the heart of our faith, to continue to journey together towards a way of living at peace with each other, with ourselves and with the earth. Big topics. Typical Corrymeela talk. And yet I hope there's also been time to simply catch up with each other. To catch up on how life has changed us since last we met here 20 months ago. What strikes me in looking at what I want to say today is how similar it is to what I talked about at the Dedication Service at St. Brigid's way back in January 2020. We seem to be picking up the conversation we started then. And yet I know I have changed since then. Significantly. For one thing, in the intervening months, I have come to embrace my inner pagan.

That is not my way of saying I'm ready to reject Christianity, but rather to acknowledge the growth I have experienced in remembering what the psalmist has said: that the heavens are telling the glory of God – and that nature speaks about God's truth in a way my words can't. These past 18 months, when I have felt particularly powerless and acutely aware of the vulnerability of people on this planet, I have also felt wonderfully held by a power that has always been there: silent, reliable, profound. The strength of the earth beneath us. The force of wind and wave. The resilience of life in all its diversity. Wisdom stored in the ringlets of trees, telling the story of the years of their life. The return and departure and return again of birds who migrate the length of this globe. The stretching of light and the shadowing of day and the steady return of the sun. All happening in front of my eyes as if for the very first time even though these miracles have happened since before the landscape around us took shape.

Chief among the lessons that nature has been teaching me is this: anyone who wants to save their life will lose it; but those who lose their life will save it. This is the faith of flowers who live their life in service to the next generation. This is the beauty that animals display in knowing instinctively what it is they must do. This is the cycle of life that must include death, the grain that must fall to the earth. Nature has been preaching the good news of resurrection every year in a way no sermon I know has managed. And its message is not only of new life after death, of spring after winter has come, but of the inescapable connection we have to each other, the interwoven roots of our compassion. This is the profound, grounded, foundational love that Jesus was dying to get us to see, the elemental truth that has been there for us, all the time. There is a power at work in this world that we don't control. And our job may be simply to let it carry us along – to go on this journey of life together.

And to be ourselves. Our true selves. Just like those flowers that blossom and fade and return again are their true selves in their living and in their dying and in their new life. Likewise, the paradox at the heart of Christianity is that to be our true selves means not insisting on our way of being – to be in such relationship with others that we stop being who we thought we were, and start being a new creation. I don't know how to be a Christian without following the example of Christ – and out of love for others Christ died, Christ relinquished himself and his power to be in a new relationship with this world. The paradox that will remain at the heart of Corrymeela is that relinquishing our 'Christian' identity may be the most Christian thing we can do. It allows us to be what Jesus called us to be. The Church was never the goal. A Christian World was never the goal. Everyone realising that we Christians are right is a horrible goal. A life where we more and more can be in relationship without violence, a life where all can be at peace with each other, with ourselves and with the earth is what this community is about.

And the fact that we now worry – or some of us now worry – about whether we are moving away from the 'Christian' roots of Corrymeela looks to me instead like evidence that Corrymeela continues to live out its 'Christian' purpose: we have sought to be in genuine relationship with others and to be changed by those relationships. We have sought to demonstrate a way of living well together that is not about me being right and you being wrong and you needing to be more like me. The fact that we have come to a theory of change [Welcoming each other (with respect and self-awareness) to explore

difference together'] that sounds so much like the Christian belief in the power of unconditional love to change us does not surprise me – even though it is articulated without any explicit Christian language. Indeed, the reason I think our Christianity is genuine and resilient is that it is always implied but never imposed.

Is Corrymeela a Christian community? I sure as hell think so. Do you have to identify as Christian to be a part of this community? That's up to you (you, singular; you, plural) But I don't know how we remain Christian without being changed by one another.

In the name of the Creator and the Christ and Holy Spirit: one God. Amen.