CELTIC WAYS TO PRAY

FINDING GOD IN THE NATURAL ELEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

About My Theological Journey

I sat on the couch in the living room. Alone. Hands at my sides, palms up, the rough red sculpted upholstery of the 1950s era pleasing against the back of my hands. I thought to myself, "If I could just never sin again, I would be clean forever." I was eight years old.

I had been baptized that day at Riverview Baptist Church in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Both of my parents had been brought up there, but we attended Grace Baptist across town near our house, our own neighborhood church that we could walk to on Sunday mornings.

A white cotton choir robe, bare feet, and three steps down into the pool of water. My sister helped me choose a Bible verse to recite from the pool for the congregation to hear. Our selection was based solely on brevity because I had to say it by heart. It was the shortest possible verse we could find. Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Hers was slightly longer. She was three years older and more adept at memorization. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life. . . ." Same book, sixth chapter, twenty-third verse.

The pastor's right arm was behind my neck and shoulders, his left hand held a white folded handkerchief over my nose and mouth, and three quick dips backward. One for the Father. One for the Son. One for the Holy Ghost. I noticed that the inside of the handkerchief didn't actually get wet. I could still smell the ironing. And miraculously, I could still breathe.

My childlike faith in Jesus, the only Son of God, who died for our sins. In the sense that he died for me, I could be forgiven, and trade in my guilt and sin-sick soul for the blood of the Lamb that would wash me clean. A soul washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. I wanted that. I loved Jesus, plus I didn't want to go to hell. That was the penalty. For Sin. And they said Jesus paid the price. I guessed that's what Paul meant by "wages."

The theological word for this notion is the Atonement, or as I have renamed it for myself: The Cosmic Swap. This is the theological idea that there is an exchange, him for me, price and wage, penalty and payment.

Paul writes things besides our memory verses in the Letter to the Romans. He writes that ever since the creation of the world God's invisible nature, namely God's power and deity, has been revealed in the things that have been made. God revealed. God known. God created heaven, and earth, and makes God's self known, through creation. I like that idea better than the part about sin and its wages. God in the things that have been made. To think that we can know God that way, through the material of the created world, and be saved by it.

How is it that we know something? Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that considers the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. Spirituality asks the epistemological question: How is it that we know God? I can know God the same way I know the rough red sculpted upholstery on the skin of the back of my hand. And know salvation. Water, earth, air, and fire—or you, and me, and all the other stuff that has been made. God bearers. God revealers. We can know God in the body.

The catechism, an "Outline of the Faith" in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, says that our ritual sacraments are "patterns of countless ways God uses material things to reach out to us."[1] Material things. All matter has the potential to bring God. God uses material things to reach out to us. I want that—to be reached by God. That's why I go outside. God is in the elements, and God is looking for me, and I want to be found. Salvation is out there, in the world, in creation.

Soteriology is the study of the saving work of Christ, and we might say it asks the epistemological question, "How is it that we know that are we saved?" One traditional way of answering that is to talk about the Atonement, the Cosmic Swap, and say that we are saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By the blood of the Lamb and the exchange, him for me, price and wage, penalty and payment.

Although Christ's death on the cross is essential to his work as the Son of God, it is not, for me, the singular work by which we are saved, or forgiven of our sins, or reconciled, or through which we know God. I rather think that his death was a necessary feature of real incarnation—a result, and consequence, of his being human. I am saved by the saving acts

of God, all of them: God's act of creating, God's act of becoming human, and God's act of dying, and rising from the dead.

The author of the Gospel according to John writes about Jesus in this way: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1), and "without him, there was not anything made, that was made" (cf. John 1:3), and "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). You remember it from midnight mass on Christmas Eve. God, born of a woman, in manger hay, and human family. Incarnation. God with a body. Flesh. Earth and substance. Matter. God using material things to reach out to us, "from heaven to earth come down," God in human form. God, in a body. For us to know.

Jesus is the Incarnate Person of the Trinity and his work fits into a larger arc, a sweeping magnum opus that begins in the act of Creation. "Without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:3). He is God in human form, becoming one with his creation to reach out and find God's humanity from within God's humanity. It is as much in his creating and in his becoming human that I am saved, found, kept, and loved. For me, his death and resurrection are more about Divine Love becoming human, and the healing and consecrating of the human body, and his calling us out of the hiding that we began in Eden, than they are about the theology of Atonement. Christ's death, and resurrection, are of a piece with the act of Creation.

The theology of the Incarnation suggests that we know God through the body. God taking the form of a human being hallows all humanity. Like Mary, all flesh holds the potential to bear God, every face reveals the face of Christ, and every baptism is a nativity: a bursting of holy water, and a birthing of the Divine. God in human form, and the physical world of matter, bears God; all flesh is holy. Incarnation is at the core of my spirituality, and is the motivation, and inspiration, for my priesthood. God is revealed in human existence, and is known in human experience.

The Creation sings a song, and we number it among the Canticles in the morning rite of Daily Prayer: "Omnia Opera Domini." All the world, sing to the Lord.[2] The church thinks it is worth beginning our day that way, every day, everyone, everywhere: to position ourselves, ground our being, locate our existence in the created order, and join in. Praying creation and creation praying. Singing it. Praying the elements of creation because God is in them.

The world becomes our oratory, and prayer becomes our orienteering, our compass work. Finding our way. Where am I, and where is God? God is in the elements, and God uses material things to reach out to us. That's why I go outside. To find and be found.

From any given point of the compass rose, direction is always toward God. If I go north, God is in the earth; if I go south, God is in the fire; if I go east, God is in the air and wind; and if I go west, God is in the water. I cannot go beyond God's reach. Every footfall, a pilgrimage. Every breath, a chanting psalm. Every eye opening, an enlightenment. Every bathing, the font of my being. This God uses material things to reach out to us. This God, who gathers the wind in God's fists (Psalm 104:4), calms a storm on the sea and walks on water (Mark 4:39 and Matthew 14:25), who rides the wind like a chariot, and wraps himself in light as with a garment (Psalm 104), and who scoops up mud to shape a man (Genesis 2:7), this is an elemental God. This God who plays with Leviathan (Psalm 104:26), and draws the circumference of the great deep (Proverbs 8:27); this God who speaks from a bush that burns and says, "'Moses, Moses! . . . Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground'" (Exodus 3:4), this is an elemental God. Holy ground. Hallowed. Because God is in it. The whole creation sings.

As a parish priest, I see my daily work as an extension of baptism and Eucharist, inviting people to more than the seven sacraments listed in the prayer book, a sacramental life, finding God in the matter of their daily lives and partnering with them in a life of meaning-making. As preacher, and celebrant, I point to, and lift up, the material substance of their lives, and proclaim that God reveals the sacred out of the mundane; the physical is spiritual; and that matter is holy. And, as a priest, I bless it, which is to say that it is good, and that God is in it, just as I do with the bread and wine at Holy Eucharist and with water at baptism. Every table a holy feast, and every bread broken the body of Christ, every face washed a reflection of the beloved waking. God is in the daily life. So, the life is holy. I preach the elements. I bless the elements. I pray the elements and sing them. Because God is in them.

So, Creation, Salvation, Epistemology, Soteriology, Revelation, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection? Long story short: We can know God through the body. Our own, and God's. We can find God in matter. And we can be saved.

About the Initiatives for Prayer

If you are an adventurer at heart, consider the initiatives to be a form of spiritual play. If you're the scientific sort, consider them a form of spiritual research, and experiment. Or, if you're the curious detective type who loves a mystery and wants to discover something, approach the directives as spiritual investigation. Think of them as a workbook, or a "how-to" manual, if you're the kind of person who likes a project. Give yourself room to make it your own.

The "Initiatives for Prayer" portion of each chapter is my invitation to you to experiment with prayer, which for the purpose of this book is the process of finding God in the elements. Try some of the ideas in this activity part of the book if you would like, and keep it light-hearted and open-ended. Approach it with a try-it-and-see attitude that invites freedom and the opportunity for discovery.

I have drawn some of the initiatives from my own personal practices, experiments I have conducted for my own spiritual interest. Some I have designed in my work with adult spiritual formation, or for use with retreat groups. So, you might want to try the initiatives on your own, but you might have fun trying some with a partner or using them to enliven conversation with a book group. You could even use them to lead others on a retreat.

The ideas are designed as a practical prayerful engagement of the theological tenets of Creation, Incarnation, and Resurrection. The purpose is to help us see, hear, taste, touch, and smell God. To help us name. To heighten our holy awareness. To fully engage our whole being in the experience of God. The initiatives are there for you to use if you want. Pick and choose, try some and skip some. Approach it like a cookbook because everyone has his or her own tastes.

The prayer initiatives in this book are invitations. We will experiment with body prayer. Listening. Finding words. Making gestures. Playing with things for prayer. We will strike flint and make fire, reach into mud, breathe in deep and blow out, and splash water to find God. Not every prayer initiative will produce the God-moment you've always been waiting for, or the result, or an I-have-arrived kind of moment. They are simply hands-on ways to pray this journey of finding God in the body, in the elements, in the material substance of creation, which is a lifelong

process. This book comes alongside you in your spiritual journey for this brief window of, and occasion for, exchange and engagement.

Thank you for the opportunity to journey with you.

A How-to for the Oratory and the Prayer Journal

Let me describe the two items I mention frequently in these prayer initiatives. One is an oratory. The other is a prayer journal.

The Oratory

The oratory is a little more nuanced, so let's begin there. The idea of an oratory is to give voice to, or to pray. Earth, air, water, and fire function like cardinal directions on a compass for finding God. They deliver God to us, in substance. In this book you will see that my practice of prayer is to go outside, to immerse myself in the elements because God is in them, or to bring the elements in, whichever the case may be. The turned spigot at the pedestal sink brings water, and with it, a gully-washing moment of God in the house.

In some parishes, an associate priest with a feverish want to pray and to teach other people to pray finds a space, a corner, an old storage closet, a throughway or passage, and turns it, with gold paint and deep, flat blue paint, like the heavens or Mary's vestment, along with a rack of votive candles, into an oratory. And people go to pray.

An oratory is a place of prayer. It is usually a tiny little room with tapers, and votives, and perhaps icons, in close proximity to the space for corporate worship and the gathered community. But literally, "oratory" means "to give voice to." Ora. Oral. Oratory. Giving voice.

This book is an oratory of sorts. My giving voice and praying with my body. It is my act of melting wax, and holy flame, and throwing myself to the pavement in a gesture of body prayer. Lying prostrate. Vesting for Holy Eucharist, and standing at the altar lifting up bread and wine and blue, gesturing with what we call the orans position, gives voice with my body to the human want for the divine. Standing on holy ground, and dishing out sacred food, and calling it bread from heaven. Pavement. Marble and ancient plank. We lay ourselves down.

For the prayer initiatives described in each chapter, you will need to construct a portable, travel-ready, carry-around, Johnny-on-the-spot ora-

tory, if you would like to use one with this book. Make, find, or buy the container that will become your prayer-on-the-hoof oratory, and mark it in some way with the compass rose, because the essential quest is to find God in the elements at every compass point, in every direction. You might just draw the compass rose on a piece of paper and place it inside of your container.

The most basic approach could be to get a brown paper lunch bag from the pantry. Other options: a tin tea box from the grocery store emptied of its tea, a shoe box, a cigar box, a jewelry box, an oatmeal cardboard tube, a jar with a lid, a container of your choosing that you could imagine becoming a holy container of treasure. In this portable oratory you might place a few things that I suggest, but mostly, your own inspiration will lead you to add treasures along the way. Just the other day, as I dashed to my car and off to work, I found a gray bird feather with a single white stripe down the middle. A treasure. Three days earlier, my grown boy brought me a tiny bird's nest that he found face down in the woods. Moments of breathless knowing that God's spirit is wind, God's body, wing. And my day, perched, and ready.

Earth, fire, water, and air are the compass points for finding God, and all the world our oratory. An oratory is our place of prayer, whether it takes the form of the human body or a room, a tea tin, or the whole wide earth.

The Prayer Journal

In general, journal-keeping is a well-worn spiritual practice and is widely understood as writing something down. The same applies here. Finding a simple bound booklet of paper and whatever kind of writing utensil you like best will suffice.

The booklet can be stapled sheets of plain paper, a spiral college-ruled notebook, a composition book like the ones we all used in third grade, or something a little chicer like a Moleskin. Then choose your favorite tool: freshly sharpened pencils accompanied by a pink pearl block eraser, a bona fide fountain pen with ink jar and nib, a selection of colored felt tips—suit your fancy.

On some occasions I will offer initiatives for the prayer journal that move you through a process of guided steps, or some kind of practice and procedure. On other occasions I will simply suggest you write down your

thoughts or reflections and discoveries. You may want to use your journal in a myriad of other ways, so you can work out your own theology with jot and tittle.

Often I will recommend writing a prayer in your journal. So, this is one easy ready reference if you need a place to start: with a collect, the name of which is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable. For a simple prayer form, the collect is a three-part prayer.

A. The Address. "Dear God." This is where you decide what name, or role, or function you want to use for God. Many collects start out with the words, "O God, who . . ."

B. The Request. This is related linguistically to the name you decided to use in the address. It is focused and descriptive, not a laundry-list kind of moment.

C. "In Your Name We Pray." This may be a reconnection, and perhaps an elaboration, on parts A and B.

Additionally, in this modern age of electronic tools some might prefer a keyboard for writing. If you do, then use one. The smart phone offers a lovely journaling component with the ever-ready camera lens, a very rich way to enhance the journaling experience. The phone may also provide a convenient and spontaneous way to list things by using the notepad icon or dictating with the microphone button as a way of capturing thoughts on the ready and composition on the fly.

Anything goes if it will make the prayer journal work for you. It is your journal, after all. Your choice. Your design. Your adventure with prayer.

PART I

God in Earth

To include rock, stone, ash, clay, cliff, crevice, mud, soil, mineral, decaying matter, soot, humus, and loam.

We come from God, unearthed from divine substance, our beginnings from the foundations of the world. Cretaceous. Jurassic, Triassic, Paleozoic. "You that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn" (Isaiah 51:1). Creator is sculptor and stone. You, hewn out of rock, out of God. Humanity birthed from a quarry. Born of divine rock. Dug from God. Chiseled stone from stone. An excavation of the Sacred One. Sameness. Bone of bone. Verity.

Earth is sacred matter. Earth delivers God in human form. Rock. Mud. Stone. Unsophisticated, uncomplicated. Primitive. Ancient. Elemental, like God. Adam, like God. Adam of clay, a terracotta compound in God's hand. Mud for fashioning. A likeness of divine image. Same substance. Holy substance.

Our accommodations were four- and five-star hotels. The kind that remove us from the earthier side of the lands we travel. You know, the ones with full-service spas that outfit us with mud masks, lava rubs, sea salt baths, and complimentary potions and lotions concocted from fruits, and herbs, and oils from the musk deer.

But then we arrived in the Old City of Jerusalem itself. To my extreme pleasure, we stayed in the hostel at Christ Church, Jerusalem, where even the floors made my heart leap with the warmth of stone every time I opened the door to my room. Delicate striated color, hard, unmoving, and muffled underfoot, and deeply welcoming. Like coming home.

As it turned out, the construction codes for Jerusalem provided for but one building material, that of native rock. Essential rock, to preserve the ancient youth and beauty of Jerusalem the Golden. Approaching from the west at sunset, I saw that the entire city glistened and gleamed golden, on fire with light and life. The City of God. Itself a testament in stone to God's glory. The beauty of Zion, Jerusalem, "my holy hill" (Psalm 2:6).

The ancient poets and prophets who penned our Holy Scriptures understood God as rock. "He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken" (Psalm 62:2). God is a stronghold, a crag, and haven. "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my

rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:2). "You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble" (Psalm 32:7a). "But the Lord has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge" (Psalm 94:22). God as unhewn rock, "the quarry from which you were dug" (Isaiah 51:1).

The image of God as rock is primitive and harkens to a spirituality that evokes our primitive existence, even our preverbal and precognitive experience. A spiritual wisdom, not learned but inborn, of our being and of our bodies. God as rock is spiritual substance and source for our most fundamental human needs: our need for safety, security, shelter, and the ability to trust.

The spirituality of knowing God as rock is not so concerned with such things as the authority, theology, and tradition of the church as it is with our sense of security, based in being and belonging. The infant experience. The satisfaction of rest in God. Body suspended in the strength of God's being. Rocked and cradled. Prayer becomes a positioning; we position ourselves in God. Instead of knowing God as a personality, we know God as place. We know God as substance.

Religion is concerned with rules, and orthodoxy, and right prayer. God as earth is, instead, elemental and, in contrast, begs a spirituality that is all about safety and shelter. Waiting in God. Resting in God. Existing in God. Like the experience of running from danger, finding a crevice in a rock mountain for safety, silencing your breath, heart pounding in your ears. Like the childhood game of hide-and-seek. Prayer without words. It is a positioning. Instead of the mighty saving acts of God, we discover that God is, in and of God's own self, safety: stationary, strong, and steadfast by God's very being.

This sort of spirituality is not as likely to make a statement of faith or think through the rationales of a creed as it is to trust. Instead of conversation, we meet God as silent and learn a nonverbal way of being. Our full body weight released into the substance and strength of God in a passionate experience like that encountered by lovers. Enfolded. Lost as a rock in a quarry, where both rock and quarry are indistinguishable. Weight. Substance. Immovable. Center-of-the-universe trust.

Earth and rock are how the ancients knew God, how they found God. Earth and rock are how I find God. The ancient Celts lived close to the earth, in the immediacy of and the exposure to the elements, and found

God to be just as immediate and fresh. God in the wind in your hair, or the rain on your back, and in the earth underfoot. God was fully present in the physical life without the confines or authority of rules, orthodoxy, and right prayer. Also, the British Isles were geographically removed from the church as empire, absolving Celtic spirituality of the need for conformity and institutional demand.

The high sacramental theology of the church, if there is such, is that the institutionalized practice of sacrament is a nod in the direction of an unbounded experience of a beautiful, unspoiled truth of God in the elements. The institutional church offers a pattern; Celtic spirituality is the thing itself—the life lived. God is present in the elements, and all creation serves as theophany. The Celts simply lived it, celebrated it, sang it, prayed it, and laid down to rest in it. They weren't afraid to touch it, declare it for themselves, to handle it with jovial care in the smooring of the fire, or the baking of the bread, or the milking of the cow.

A central thread of Celtic spirituality is that all of creation was brought into being out of God's being rather than, as the theological notion of *ex nihilo* suggests, out of nothing. The act of creation was God bringing something out of the very substance and existence of God. It follows that all of creation is a theophany. All of creation has the potential to reveal God to us. Creation itself is sacred: a God-bearer. At the center of everything is the light that darkness has not overcome. The life of all things is God's beating heart at the center of every created thing.

A particular, lovely, dramatic truth from story: John, the beloved disciple who penned our gospel, sat next to Jesus at the Last Supper. Actually, they reclined, as they would have in first-century culture. John writes that he reclined next to Jesus and leaned in close enough to speak in whispers about something that was troubling him. From that lean-in to Jesus's chest, John would have been able to hear his heart beating. From this vignette, Celtic spirituality coined the phrase "listening for the heartbeat of God."[3] In this Incarnate One, whom we call Jesus, God's heart beats. Celtic spirituality holds dear the practice of listening for that heartbeat of God in all of creation.

As a priest in the Episcopal Church, I am keenly aware that the church does not own, control, or negotiate a person's ability to find or be found by God. The church simply offers sacrament, which is our way of lifting up the elements—of bread and wine, for example—and saying that God is

in them. A sacramental life is the one we live when we leave, out through the church doors, knowing that God is in our bellies, and is in fact in all bread broken. Every table or bundled knapsack of bread is a divine feast worth celebrating because God is in the bread, in all bread. Because God is present in the earth, and grain, and sun, and rain that brought the bread to the table. We can find God there.

The catechism says that the sacraments are "patterns."[4] I am a seamstress, so to me, the word "pattern" is exciting. It means I can take that pattern and make something of my own. Something that fits me particularly, something that I can actually wear, that I can live inside of, that makes me ready to go out into the world to find God. Sacrament as pattern empowers me to put it to use, to live a holy sacramental life that emanates God. The pattern of breaking bread at the eucharistic table gives us a way to see and find God in any bread broken—in the bread I break with my children, or with an aging friend, or in sharing a sandwich with a beggar on the street, and knowing that we are in communion, one body, with one another, and with the Christ.

The catechism also says that God "does not limit himself" to the sacramental rites of the church, but that there are "countless ways by which God uses material things to reach out to us."[5]

Material things. The world of matter. God uses matter to reach out to us, and we can find God in matter. So, I can go outside, and hold up a handful of loam or humus, and say "God is in this earth," or I can lift up an infant human form over a font and say, "God is in this child." God is in the matter. Physical and spiritual are inextricably bound together. The sacraments are reminders to live it and look for it. We remember together in community that the spiritual realities of life are manifest in the physical world, and that our own individual lives are full of God. The sea-breeze on the coast of Ireland smells of a salty deity; the green hills offer a gentle earthy bedding with the sacred for the four-footed and wooly, or for the two-footed walking upright with a staff. We are matter, and we find and meet God in that matter, in our bodies. We are walking, talking, heart-beating sacrament. We are matter, material substance, through which God reaches out to us, and we are tangled up with God in our very own being.

Our first images of God are in the faces of mothers and fathers who bring us into the world, and who nurture us in our earliest moments,

and carry us on our way to health, and wholeness, or not. But they are interchangeable, God and mother, God and father, not just because of the parent-child relationship, but because we, all our physical stuff of matter, are infused with the divine, and so we are the face of God for one another. God in human form: God in my human form, and in your human form, as in the human form of the Incarnate One. Formed of the dust.

Creation itself is an expression of God's being, something out of God's own substance, and humanity a more particular expression of God's image. Life is saturated with God, the physical permeated with the spiritual, and the spiritual dependent on the physical to be manifest. This is why, as a priest, I know that if I have disappointed a parishioner, their disappointment is with God. This is why, as a mother, if my children are angry with me, they are angry with God. This is why, as a wife, if I am swept up in the ecstatic love of my beloved, I am swept up with God.

Therein lie the thrill and the risk. If it is all God, reaching out to us through matter, then God is at our fingertips, and in our touching, God is in the scent of a petunia, in my daydreaming on the porch swing, or my snatching a conch shell out of its tumbling in the surf. God is present to me in all of it, and yet it is not idyllic. The risk is enormous, and equally weighty, with the Divine. The possibility for damage and destruction, profound.

A mother exasperated and exhausted with the immediacy of a three-year-old underfoot in the kitchen, hissed and yanked his arm: "Stephen. I don't need a shadow." Whether we want it or not, we are God's image. For that fragile moment, would that it were not so. Had some God image in her life pushed her away, wounded her with such an unbearable rejection that she, for her own self, lost God, and all want for holy intimacy? Did she never know God's want for her to follow God around so closely as to be underfoot, in God's shadow, or hiding under God's wing? She could not see her child as a God image enticing her back into the playful shadow dance of devotion. For that one day in the kitchen, she could not name herself to be a God image, and offer her toddler divine shelter and hiding place, and make it "a God-reached moment" for her little boy. Who among us has not dissolved in the guilt and sorrow of our God-defying behavior, and regretted the wreckage in our wake? We cannot always come through, and so we explore other holy possibilities like confession, and absolution, the freedom of forgiveness, and the rite of reconciliation, and all manner

of repair. All of these are healing salve, and give us the chance to see death through to its completion, which is to say, to resurrection.

The elemental God. God as earth. Substance. Rock and stone. Forest floor. Humus. Clay and cliff. Ash and soot. Quarry. We are of God. The earth as holy expression and divine manifestation. The earth is sacred, and we are of the earth. Human. Incarnate. God in form and substance. We mine the earth for mud mask, and lava rub, for the spa life, and being born again. Feet on the ground. Knowing as we are known.

> Throughout history stone has always carried a religious significance and the Celtic peoples recognized this as they took something vitally important in the pre-Christian world and brought it into the new world of Christianity. When they placed these standing stone crosses so prominently in the landscape, they were saying something about the place of the cross in their lives. Here, in the words of Patrick Thomas, is "Celtic Christian stonework with the message of creation restored and made whole by the cross of Christ."[6]

In earth and stone, we find return to God, and the peace and pleasure of coming home. Earth to earth. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. The divine matter of which we are made.