

Water from an Ancient Well: In Love with Christ
Psalm 42:1
Sunday, June 28, 2026

Today, we are starting a new sermon series based on a book by my friend Kenneth McIntosh, titled "Water from an Ancient Well: Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life." I have been privileged to meet and learn from Kenneth through a local group here in Bell County that focuses on Celtic Spirituality. You may be wondering, "What is 'Celtic spirituality?'" (No, it is not based on being a fan of Boston's NBA team, the Celtics. Sports are a whole different religion!) Without going into too much of a history lesson, it is a reconstruction (as best we can make it) of the Christian faith unique to the British Isles from the time of Christ through the early Middle Ages. While I do not agree with everything in McIntosh's book, it is a good primer on this branch of early Christianity. Celtic Christianity has been hugely influential in my own faith, so I would love to share with you some of what I have learned through this study in this sermon series, in hopes that it can build up your faith as well.

I find the image of God as water in the book's title to be very appropriate. As we all know, water is essential to all life on our planet. Human civilization is built around access to water, and when it is unavailable, we have to move elsewhere to find it. This need for water creates conflict. Much of our political conflict here in the village and throughout Central Texas centers on projects like housing developments and data centers that might take the water we so badly need. Even though most of us have not faced true medical-emergency-level thirst, we all know that feeling when a cold glass of ice water tastes so, so good.

Yet for us modern humans, the life-giving power of pure water often pales in comparison to other drinks. We have whole industries designed to make our water more palatable by

adding flavors, sugar, or caffeine. I myself have to have a bottle that reminds me when I should drink so I don't get dehydrated. Why do we need all of this when water is so necessary to us? Perhaps water is so easily available that we forget how special it is. Perhaps we have forgotten what it means to really thirst, and it's only when the medical effects become apparent that we notice our lack. Sometimes those effects can be very subtle, such as headaches, brain fog, and fatigue. We can chalk these effects up to our hectic modern lives, but what we really need is water.

In the Bible, Jesus likens himself to living water. Celtic Christians understood this thirst for the living Christ. It was a thirst grounded in the earthly stuff of life rather than in shallow emotional manipulation. It was a faith that took the call to love God with everything we have very seriously. It was a love of Jesus Christ that recognized that he was not just a 1st-century Jewish teacher who taught with the power of God, but God, the logos of God, through whom all was created, all that ever has been, and through God's Holy Spirit continues to sustain all that is. The ancient Celts desired Christ always, as reflected in one of the most famous Celtic prayers, the prayer of St. Patrick. "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit, Christ when I stand, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me."

The ancient Celts loved Christ in ways that seem almost scandalous to us today. The Celtic saint Columbanus, who traveled throughout Europe preaching the Gospel, told his followers, "Let us desire [Christ] like people who are ravenous... let us always drink of his [living

water] with an overflowing love, let us always drink of his [living water] with a fullness of longing." In a poem attributed to Saint Brigid of Kildare, she writes, "I would like a great lake of ale, for the King of Kings...I would like cheerfulness to preside over all...I would like Jesus to be present...I would like the friends of Heaven to be gathered around us from all places. I would like a great lake of beer for the King of Kings. I would like to see Heaven's family drinking it through all eternity." Scandalous, perhaps, depending on your views, but one cannot deny the joyful love of Christ found in the poem!

So how do we fall in love with Christ for the first time or rekindle our love for Christ? How can we have such joy and fellowship with Christ? I believe the first step is to remind yourself of whom you love. We love a God who is love, in whom the relationship among the Father, Son, and Spirit is a divine dance of relational love. This love reaches out in the creation of our universe and in the coming of Jesus, who teaches us what it means to live in this divine love. God loved us before we even knew God, and God desires a relationship with us and wants to guide us into an abundant life lived in God. We need to remind ourselves that the one we ultimately pursue in love is not the church, not our small group, not a particular expression of Christianity, not even the Bible, but God, manifested in Jesus Christ and in the movement of the Holy Spirit. We must be careful not to make idols of our own.

I also believe we sometimes need a reminder of what it means to love. Christianity often falls into one of two extremes: either a cold, intellectual belief system focused on dogma or an overly emotional system fixated on outward manifestations of the "spiritual." In recent decades, I have seen much more of the first in our tradition. Yet if we consider the love we feel for our significant others, or even the material possessions we "love," we realize that emotion is part of

what it means to love. The best love is not just intellectual assent or a sense of "toughing it out," but passion and fire! We need to overcome our fear of embracing the emotional side of our faith, whether in the heights of praise or the depths of despair. To love God with everything we have includes our emotions, and God can handle us being real with God.

We can also fall more deeply in love with Christ by remembering our personal journey of faith, including that of our ancestors. In the Old Testament, the Israelites often set up stones to commemorate God's acts. These stones reminded future generations of God's presence and provision. Celtic Christians did the same with standing Celtic crosses, many of which can still be found in England today. My people came from England, so the ancient Celtic branch of faith appeals to me. What is your background, and how does it tie into your faith? Many resources are available on the history of the Christian faith across various cultural contexts. The well of the living water of Christ has sprung up all over this world. Exploring these can broaden and deepen your understanding of the path that led you to be here this morning.

This exploration can then move to the personal level. What have been the wells of living water in your life? When did God come through for you? What are the important milestones on your journey? Remember how your love of Christ began. What drew you to God in the first place? What were the first stirrings of prevenient grace in your life? Was it the love of your Christian parents? That song at youth camp? The love and care of a small group or Sunday school class leader? What does this reveal about the things that energize your faith, and how can you get more of that?

By examining the past, you can find hints of what will speak to you now. Your path is yours, so don't try to imitate only another person's spiritual path. The church can sometimes

make us feel that there are only a certain number of ways to express our spiritual life, but God is a creative God, and love is always seeking new paths of expression. Maybe there are new paths for you to find ways to love Christ more. (A great resource in this area is the book "Sacred Pathways" by Gary Thomas.) Embrace things that take you out of your comfort zone on occasion! Last week, we all danced like crazy to our VBS songs. We forgot that we looked silly and embraced this "new" way of worship. I saw so many smiles and so much joy! May we always have such an attitude as we experience the joy and delight of the pursuit of the living water of Christ. Amen.