

Lent 2, 03/17/2019

May you have: a world of wishes at your command. God and his angels close to hand. Friends and family their love impart, and Irish blessings in your heart! Amen.

Who can tell me anything that they know about St. Patrick?

Well, after some research, I found out that I knew almost nothing about him. Today happens to be his feast day but His story resonates with St Paul's in amazing ways.

He was born around 387 AD and was a Britain within the Roman Empire. He was not Irish at all. When he was 16 years old, a band of Celtic pirates sailed from Ireland and conducted raids in that part of England. The Irish were famous for plying the slave trade, and in these raids, they captured and carted off foreign people to serve the chieftains and warlords of that pagan island. Patrick was captured during one of these raids and taken against his will far from home.

Once in Ireland, Patrick was sold to a tribal chieftain, a Druid named Miliuc, who promptly put Patrick to work herding cattle in the hills. It was lonely and dangerous work. He was given little food or clothing and was constantly exposed to the elements of those windswept places. Alone with his thoughts, Patrick began to pray to God, something he had not done in the past.

He writes in his autobiography *Confessio* ("Confession)," he describes his 7 years in captivity: "After I reached Ireland, I used to pasture the flock each day and I used to pray many times a day. More and more did the love of God, and my fear of him and faith increase, and my spirit was moved so that in a day [I said] from one up to a hundred prayers, and in the night a like number; besides I used to stay out in the forests and on the mountain and I would wake up before daylight to pray in the snow, in icy coldness, in rain, and I used to feel neither ill nor any slothfulness, because, as I now see, the Spirit was burning in me at that time."

He had a dream that a ship would return him home and it is said that he walked 200 miles to the sea and caught a ship back to Britain. He says that after his return he had another dream in which a letter was delivered to him from the people of Ireland asking him to return to be with them. Patrick says: "I read the beginning of the letter: 'The Voice of the

Irish,” and as I was reading the beginning of the letter I seemed at that moment to hear the voice of those who were beside the forest of Foclut which is near the western sea, and they were crying as if with one voice: ‘We beg you, holy youth, that you shall come and shall walk again among us.’”

However, Patrick did not feel educated enough to undertake this task and spent the next 10-15 years in a process to become a priest. He then returned to evangelize the very people who had held him as a slave. As he had spent 7 years there, he was very familiar with the language and traditions of the people. The Church of Rome expected him to teach the locals, Latin, and incorporate the ways of Rome there. Patrick decided not to do that and taught in the language of the people and honored their traditions as much as he could. No doubt that this led to a greater degree of success than he would have had otherwise.

Rather than set up a church as the center of a parish and get people to come, Patrick and his entourage engaged in a relational strategy. He went to them.

He would go to tribal settlements and meet with the elders. He and those with him, would pray for the sick and counsel with those who were willing. He would pray for their needs. In this way, he helped to make the mundane sacred.

Arriving at a tribal settlement, Patrick would engage the chieftain in conversation, hoping for a conversion or at least for his permission to camp nearby. The team would then meet with the people, engage them in conversation and look for those who were receptive. They would pray for sick people, counsel those who needed it and mediate conflicts. On at least one occasion, Patrick blessed a river and prayed for the people to catch more fish.

In this way, he made sacred, the mundane every day parts of life in their communities. He found God and revealed God in the plainest of circumstances. He used stories and parables to engage the people’s imaginations and connection to nature.

Patrick encouraged the people to ask questions and express their hopes and fears. After a while, a community of faith emerged, and Patrick and his entourage would move on, leaving behind a priest to nurture the fledgling community. Women were an important part of his ministry which, as we know, was not supported by Rome.

He tirelessly traveled the Irish countryside going into tribal communities and evangelizing. It is not difficult to see the connection with Paul's ministry.

Paul tirelessly traveled throughout Phillipi, Corinth, Ephesus, and Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, Galatia, Thessalonica, Colossae, and eventually Rome itself, although was a prisoner there. In each community he went to, he shared the message of Jesus with all that he met, often at the peril of his own life. Like Paul, Patrick changed and enriched the local culture with the message of the gospel.

Both Paul and Patrick practiced the Way of Love.

This is the same Way of Love that we are called to in this Season of Lent. In Dec 2017, Bishop Curry called together Bishops, clergy and laypeople to consider how to help Episcopalians keep Jesus at the center of their lives and at the center of the church. Many congregations started small groups during Advent of 2018 to see how this might work.

What is the Way of Love that we are being asked to live out?

Bishop Curry introduces it this way: "In the first century, Jesus of Nazareth inspired a movement. A community of people whose lives were centered on Jesus Christ and committed to living the way of God's unconditional, unselfish, sacrificial, and redemptive love. Before they were called "church" or "Christian," this Jesus Movement was simply called "the way."

Today I believe our vocation is to live as the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. But how can we together grow more deeply with Jesus Christ at the center of our lives, so we can bear witness to his way of love in and for the world?

The deep roots of our Christian tradition may offer just such a path. For centuries, monastic communities have shaped their lives around rhythms and disciplines for following Jesus together. Such a pattern is known as a "Rule of Life." The framework you now hold – The Way of Love: Practices for Jesus-Centered Life – outlines a Rule for the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement.

It is designed to be spare and spacious, so that individuals, ministry groups, congregations, and networks can flesh it out in unique ways and build a church-wide treasure trove of stories and resources". He concludes: "There is no specific order you need to follow. If you

already keep a Rule or spiritual disciplines, you might reflect and discover how that path intersects with this one. By entering into reflection, discernment and commitment around the practices of Turn - Learn - Pray - Worship - Bless - Go - Rest, I pray we will grow as communities following the loving, liberating, life-giving way of Jesus. His way has the power to change each of our lives and to change this world”.

Part of the Reflection process in each of these 7 areas; Turning back to Christ; Learning through Scripture; Praying often; Blessing others through action; Going to others; and Resting our bodies, minds and souls; include:

-What will you do?

-How will you do it?

-And who will accompany you in this journey?

There are no short or quick answers to these questions. Saying that we are just going to love others more, doesn't work all that well without a plan. Paul had a plan, Patrick had a plan; and we need a plan.

We can do this together.

So, of course, celebrate and wear your green today, but if you're really going to honor Saint Patrick, the best way would be for you to:

--offer some holy conversation to a person who needs it,

--engage that person who may be difficult for you,

--offer some help to a neighbor without being asked,

--drop a note to someone who could use some encouragement,

--and to begin by connecting with someone you don't know.

Know that the second you walk out the church doors you are a missionary who, like Patrick, is called to “walk among” the people of your community, offering them hospitality, friendship and the good news of Jesus Christ.

It's the kind of missionary work that can transform a community and even the world.