

## St. Patrick

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Lk 13:31-35

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Happy St. Patrick's Day!

I speak briefly about Patrick, the missionary and bishop of Ireland.

He lived in the years AD 385–461, yes!,

just a couple of hundred years after the first disciples of Jesus!

Within 200 years, Christianity had spread as far west as Britain.

Patrick was born in to a noble, rich family in Britain.

His grandfather was a priest in the Catholic church,  
his father a deacon.

When Patrick was sixteen, Irish invaders kidnapped him and took him into slavery in Ireland.

For six years he worked as slave herding sheep.

He had plenty of time for silent retreat and prayer,  
alone in the hills with sheep.

While in the hills, God told Patrick to flee and he eventually was able to escape to the coast,  
get a boat to Britain and return home.

Out of his experience observing the Irish and out of clear call from God

Patrick insisted on becoming a Christian missionary

to the very ones who kidnapped and enslaved him.

One of the legends of St. Patrick is that he drove all the snakes out of Ireland.

Ireland, being an isolated island never had snakes,

but the legend is an allegory of Patrick driving out pagan worship from the land.

Another is the shamrock as a symbol of our Trinitarian God.

Patrick was largely illiterate, so he used images to convey Christian truths.

The 3-leafed shamrock illustrated God as one in three persons.

I tell of St. Patrick to remind us that what God asks of us is not always nice and easy.

Patrick's return to Ireland was difficult and often violent.

We like church cozy and warm,

and yet there are many things not right in our families and not right among our neighbors.

Sometimes God calls us to confront difficult situations.

Therefore, our cozy and warm time should also be a time of preparing for what is to come.

And Jesus has warned that trouble will come.

Make no mistake, Herod was not a nice person.

He seduced his brother's wife.

When John the Baptist objected, Herod had John executed.

Herod was a Jew who ruled Galilee under the favor of Roman.

But enforcing Roman rule, he made enemies of Jews.

Ambitious, ruthless,

defiant of Jewish traditions and deaf to God's word,

he did what was expedient to further his own power.

Jesus called him a "fox."

Not "clever as a fox" as in children's fables,

but cunning, deceitful, secretly destructive,

lacking any redeeming quality.

Jesus essentially was calling him a *cockroach*.

But Herod's threat is not what motivates the Pharisees to warn Jesus.

Herod liked to listen to John the Baptist.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 6:20.

Herod was a Jew and liked hearing of Jewish heroes and God's ways.  
 Even though Herod had John the Baptist imprisoned,  
     he protected John  
         and brought John in to his own chambers to hear what John had to say.  
 And so we read in Luke 9, verse 9,  
     that Herod also wanted to hear from *Jesus*.

*Pharisees* are Jews who wanted to bring all the Jews  
 to strict obedience and faith in God.  
 The Pharisees claimed that Herod wanted to kill Jesus,  
 yet at the trial of Jesus in Jerusalem just before his crucifixion we read,  
     *When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad,*  
     *for he had been wanting to see him for a long time,*  
     *because he had heard about him*  
     *and was hoping to see him perform some sign.*<sup>2</sup>

Herod wanted to meet Jesus, but not to kill him.  
 The Pharisees were not entirely honest.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke  
     the Pharisees give Jesus trouble.  
 Jesus does meet with them and even socialize with them from time to time,  
     but the Pharisees are never really friendly toward him.  
 Times were dangerous for Jews under the Romans.  
 For centuries the Jews had been trying to throw off foreign occupation  
     and establish once again their own kingdom and rule.  
 The Roman Empire would violently put down any Jewish rebellion,  
     and a few years after Jesus,  
     the Romans did destroy the Jerusalem temple and exiled Jews.  
 The Pharisee Jews did not want anyone causing senseless trouble with the authorities.

But more so, the Pharisees simply did not like Jesus.  
 Pharisees sought reform and correct observances of *religious practices*.  
 Yet Jesus did things contrary  
     like eat with defiled hands and talk to sinners.  
 The Pharisees did not really care what Herod might do to Jesus.  
 When they said, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you,"  
     they only wanted Jesus gone.

Jesus was sent by God to *redeem the world*.  
 That is religious language that means  
     *Jesus came to change things*.  
 Jesus came to change the wrongs of this world,  
     to change injustices done,  
     to change economic realities so that all people have a chance at life,  
     to change social divisions and break down suspicions,  
     to change attitudes that demean and put down others,  
     to change destructive habits,  
     to change despair, hopelessness and fear.  
 Jesus came to *change things*.

Yet change is frightening.  
 There are two kinds of change,  
     the kind that tries to make *present things better*,  
     and the kind that tries to make *different things altogether*.

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 23:8.

It's this last kind of change that is most frightening.  
 Sometimes we need to change toward something different altogether,  
     but it is seldom clear what that different thing might be.  
 Uncertainty and no promise of success  
     makes fundamental change frightening.  
 For some people,  
     it is preferable to just put up with the problems and horrors of what is known  
     than to step out into what is unknown.  
 The key issue then is not *how good* any change might be or how bright the future.  
 The key issue then is *how confident is a person*  
     that we will be alright whatever change may come.  
 It's not about whether change is bad or good,  
     it's about how confident we are  
     that God will see us through whatever may come.

Jesus came to redeem a sinful world.  
 That is religious language that means  
     Jesus came to change what is wrong with this world.  
 "I am casting out demons," he said,  
     "and performing cures today and tomorrow,  
     and on the third day I finish my work."  
 Demons are those forces and circumstances *that break down community*.  
     Not so much bad beings with little horns, but *mean-spiritedness*.  
 Demons drive people apart,  
     make mischief with relationships,  
     cause suspicion and grumbling and mistrust.  
 Demons divide.  
 Demons set people against each other  
     and cause insecurity that then seeks scapegoats.  
 Demons set people against each other and create suspicion and distrust.

So when Jesus said he is casting out demons,  
     he confronts and changes those *social structures* that cause division and distrust.  
 And when Jesus said he is performing cures,  
     he corrects and overcomes health and physical wrongs  
     that doom people to second class citizenship called "invalid."  
 And when Jesus said he completes his work on the third day,  
     he ends death itself,  
     putting a stop to nihilistic attitudes that nothing is of value or purpose.

"On the third day *I finish* my work,"  
     Jesus means that on the resurrection  
     Jesus fulfills all that he set out to do,  
     Jesus completes the act of God in changing this world  
     Jesus ends the way things are and brings about a different reality altogether.

The demons still try to assert themselves and say,  
     "But what about all the crime and war and killings going on still?"  
 Yes, there is still mopping up to do,  
     and that is *our* work as the church of Jesus Christ.  
 But Jesus has proven that social injustices shall not endure,  
     and has given *us* the ministry of reconciliation.  
 Jesus has also given *us* the power of healing,  
     of curing diseases and making well,  
     of therapy and counseling and mutual support,  
     of restoring bodies and souls, families and friends,

of teaching life skills like money management,  
 child rearing, marriage renewal, Christian character, good citizenship.  
 Jesus has given *to us* the ministry of reconciling and redeeming.  
 And Jesus has given *us* the gift of *knowing*  
 that death is but a faint shadow on the way to continued life.

Things do not have to be the way they are.  
 The world is not on a trajectory to failure and extinction.  
 God's Holy Spirit is moving over chaotic waters once again.  
 The Holy Spirit of Jesus permeates this world with life and hope.  
 Things *will change*.  
*God's Holy Spirit is not done* and *we* are carried on a wave of renewal.  
 The only question for us is the packaging,  
*how we present* God's Good News of life and blessed future  
 to our new neighbors and friends.

There is an old prayer that calls attention to the fact that we are not alone,  
 that Jesus has transcended the limits of time  
 and is already waiting for us in whatever may come.  
 It is a prayer of confidence  
 that though changes are rushing upon us  
 and though we don't know what our place will be in it all,  
 that with Jesus, it will be OK and that we still have a place and we still belong.

*O God, you have called us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,  
 by paths as yet untrdden, through perils unknown.  
 Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,  
 but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us;  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.304. Originally from Eric Milner-White and George Wallace Briggs, *Daily Prayer* (London: Oxford, 1941)