

Sermon
5th Sunday of Lent Year B
3.17.24

“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.

Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.” John 12:26

Good morning, St. Dunstan family!
Good morning to our online family!

Imagine being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

As in the case of a certain young man who lived a life of entitlement and privilege. He was hanging out down by the beach when suddenly he kidnapped at age the tender age of 16, what we currently call human trafficking. He was taken from his home and brought to a entirely different country. Because life is cheap and his captors wanted cash, he was then sold into slavery.

He spent the next six years of his life literally slaving away. This fundamental time when his former colleagues were receiving an amazing education,

he was doing forced labor of filth and grime as a farm hand, mucking stalls, tending sheep. He had two constant companions: nakedness and hunger.

He raised in a Christian home, his grandfather was a priest, and his father was a deacon. Earlier in life, our young man did not have time or give any thought to the faith of his family until the day came when he realized just how much he needed for it.

I'll get back to the plights of our young man in a moment.

Our Gospel reading for today has Jesus visiting with some Greeks.

We see in verse 20, a group of Gentile Greeks ask to meet with Jesus. By clearing out the marketplace from the court of the Gentiles, Jesus had reestablished a quiet place for prayer for them.

There were two temple cleansing incidents, the Gospel of John mentions the first clearing in Chapter 2 and the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, mention the second cleansing of the temple area during Holy Week. Anyway, the point is Jesus cleared the place where Gentiles were permitted to

worship. Perhaps these Greek gentiles were coming to thank him. They come first to Philip, presumably because he has a Greek name. The detail that they had come to worship at the feast indicates that they are “God fearers,” that is, Gentiles who worship the God of Israel but had not become fully converted to Judaism.¹

Throughout the stories of the Gospels by now we have heard Jesus say over and over ‘his time had not yet come.’

In verse 23, from Jesus’ own lips the proclamation is made: **the hour has come**. That’s a mic drop.

But wait. What happened to the Greeks? Why would John put this detail here?

There is nothing else mentioned regarding the Greeks. (As a former ‘preppy’ from the 80’s, I can’t help but think of penny loafers without socks, khaki pants, and button down collared shirts whenever I read the phrase “The

¹ **Gospel: John 12:20-33**

Greeks”). They, these Greeks, had served their purpose. They **were** the sign Jesus had been looking for. The Gentile world has come knocking. This was an indication to Jesus that the time for the cross had come.

When I read verses 23–28 it almost sound more like a soliloquy:

Then you may say, Excuse me Mtr. Leesa, remind again, it’s been a while since English class, remind me what is a soliloquy? A soliloquy is the act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers,

“The kernel must fall into the ground and die.”

“The man who hates his life will keep it.”

“Whoever serves me must follow me.”

Here Jesus makes one of his most encouraging statements to his followers, though most of us just read right past it: “If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”

Back to the story of our young man.

It was under these harsh conditions that our young man learned to constantly pray. He needed God! On one of those cold and lonely nights perhaps he remembered this verse from our Psalter reading, (Psalm 119:9-10)

How can a young man cleanse his way?
By keeping your words.
With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.

One night he heard a mysterious voice telling him it was time to leave. At the age of 22, the young man escaped. He walked 200 miles to the coast. Of this long journey he wrote: “I turned on my heel and ran away, leaving behind the man to whom I had been enslaved for six years. Yet I came away from him in the power of God,

for it was God who was guiding my every step for the best. And so, I felt not the least anxiety until I reached the ship.” Recall our Gospel reading John 12:26,

“If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”

After walking to a seaport, he miraculously found passage and made his way back home.... but not for long.

You see, our young man has a name, **Patricius**.

But we know him as Patrick.

Patrick lived after Christianity became mainstream in the Roman Empire. He was born sometime around 386 in Britain and died on this day around 460 in Ireland.

Because of his captivity, Patrick missed a formal education. He later spent time training for the priesthood, and even became the Bishop of Ireland but he lacked the classical training of his contemporaries. As a consequence, when he finally went back to Ireland, he had to rely on skills other than classical oration or philosophical theology to work with the Irish people.

His lack of training became a strength. Remember our Gospel reading John 12:26,

“If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”

When he came up against Druidic shaman and pagan kings, it was Patrick's prayer life that impressed them and not his rhetorical skill.

Patrick's belief that all the world belonged to God became part of his power.

An example of his confidence in God's world was his legendary use of nature to teach about the Holy Trinity.

According to legend, Patrick would take up a three-leaf clover and ask, "Does it have one leaf or three?" Those listening would respond, "both."

Patrick then explained, **"And so it is with the Trinity - Father, Son, and Spirit are one God. Three persons in one."**

Patrick's practical emphasis on the Trinity extended beyond the shamrock.

During the 1800's, a 10th-century manuscript translation in Dublin included a hymn called "St. Patrick's Breastplate."

Though it was impossible to tell if Patrick actually wrote the hymn, he still received the credit for it.

"St. Patrick's Breastplate" was a protective prayer. Celtic monks used it to start their day.

The prayer began:

I arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,

Through a belief in the Threeness,

Through confession of the Oneness

Of the Creator of creation.

I arise today

The hymn was several stanzas long, and the last two stanzas were especially memorable and moving:

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 down,

Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,

Christ in the eye that sees me,

Christ in the ear that hears me.

I arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,

Through a belief in the Threeness,

Through a confession of the Oneness

Of the Creator of Creation.

Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:

Praise to the Lord of my salvation,

Salvation is of Christ the Lord."

I have a question for you. Can we, today here in 2024, relate to Patrick?

Patrick's life was full of obstacles. So, for those who are enslaved with any issues of shame, self-worth, and self-loathing remember: Patrick lacked education and experienced a terrifying adolescence. Yet those experiences

prepared him to become a leader able to reach out to those outside the walls of the church.

Patrick's lack of formal education made him a **practical theologian**, but a theologian none-the-less. He was also a **social activist**. Patrick was one of Christianity's first outspoken opponents of slavery. Patrick's *Letter to Coroticus* described converts taken into slavery, with the sign of the cross still fresh on their foreheads. Patrick pleaded for their safe return. He begged Britain's Christian leadership for help, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Patrick's decision to identify himself with the Irish, a culture outside of Roman Christianity, diminished his ability to influence the church in Britain. Patrick 's heart for 'the least of these' could be seen as he was especially concerned about how Christian women suffered in slavery.

His outcries against slavery were eventually successful. During Patrick's lifetime (or shortly after), the slave trade in Ireland stopped.

On this St. Patrick's Day, we should be reminded that the world still needs people like St. Patrick. Can you and I be like Patrick and become modern practical theologians who speak out against injustice?

Modern St. Patricks are people who (a) love God deeply and are able to discern His calling, (b) are able to teach deep truths from the sharing our common experience, and (c) demonstrate our faith through a genuine love for people, advocating the cause of those who cannot defend themselves; often this advocacy is motivated by personal experience.

St. Patrick was born over 1,600 years ago. He was the next great Christian missionary that we know of after St. Paul.

Today, let's celebrate St. Patrick!

The world still needs St. Patrick, and not just in Ireland.