

March 17, 2019
Lent 2, Year C
The Rev. Mark Pendleton
Christ Church, Exeter

Go and Tell

There are a few times in the gospels when Jesus says simply: Go and tell. I love those moments. It is the ultimate response and deflection. One of my favorite verses is in Luke 7 when followers of John the Baptist were sent to Jesus to see if he was for real. "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" And Jesus' response: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them."

Go and tell. Seems like an odd thing to point to during a Lenten season when our focus is more likely to look inward and listen.

In today's gospel, when warned that King Herod wanted to kill him, Jesus responds: "Go and tell." "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way.' because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' (Luke 13:31-35)

Jesus lives under the shadow of Herod for his entire life. There were actually three King Herod's mentioned in the gospels, which causes some confusion. There was Herod the Great who tried to lure the Magi to lead him to the newborn Christ child – the same tyrant who called for the killing of the male infants in and around Bethlehem. This is the Herod of Christmas. That Herod died and was replaced by his eldest son, who was so ruthless that Jesus and his family fled far away to Galilee out of his reach. The third Herod was the one who called for the head of John the Baptist on a platter and turned up in Jerusalem at the trial of Jesus. This is the Herod Jesus called a fox, a clever and ferocious animal known for choosing their innocent prey carefully. From the moment he has born to his last days the gospels show us a Jesus who was seen as a threat to the political and religious rulers. What we see is one who is not afraid to push back and knows when it is time to get moving. Go and tell friend and foe alike. Look at what God is doing right in front of you. People's lives are being touched and changed.

We live in a time of shiny objects and distractions when we are tempted to look over there, when right in front of us, in the ordinary, there may be good things happening that are hopeful and promising and real. It can be far too easy to get swept up into a narrative of negativity and helplessness that we can fail to see God working in us to lift up, cast off, and make new.

That is the work we are called to do – during and beyond Lent. We come week after week not to just learn about God and Jesus, not only to worship and pray, but we come in order

to cooperate in this whole wonderful human/divine experiment. We are gathered and then sent out in order to make our way with through this life – changed.

I always like mention that the earliest followers of Jesus were called people of “the Way” before they were called Christians. Jesus, in our gospel today, was looking into the near future at his final end in Jerusalem. “Today, tomorrow and the next day I must be on my way,” Jesus said.

In the Inquirers’ Classes I have been leading over these last weeks, our focus has been to describe a bit the history of the Anglican tradition and the inner workings of the Episcopal Church. We are an odd group, held together not by the authority of a pope but through a shared history and worship born out of the tumultuous English Reformation of the 16th century. We have been a people of the *Via media*, or Middle Way, straddling the Catholic and Protestant worlds.

This heritage provides a perfect space on this day to say a few words about St. Patrick. Today March 17 is the feast day of, if not the most beloved saint, one of the more famous saints of the church: Patrick, the apostle of the Irish people. St. Patrick’s Day for many does not dwell on the saint’s missionary endeavors but rather how many things could be turned bright green and consumed.

Doing some digging however (from *Lessons of Fasts and Feasts*) we learn that Patrick was born in Britain, not Ireland, in the year 390. His grandfather was a priest and his own father a deacon, reminding us that clergy celibacy has not always been the rule of the church.

We hear much in the news today about the horrible effects of human trafficking and forced labor moving people across borders and around the globe as modern-day slaves. Sadly, this modern reality has ancient roots. Patrick too was trafficked, captured at age 16 by a band of Irish slave-traders and was made to work for six years as a shepherd, sustained, he wrote later, only by his faith. He later escaped back home and studied to become both a priest and later a bishop. In a vision, he heard a call to return to the land where he had once been held against his will.

For the following thirty years Patrick achieved great success in converting local pagan kings and their tribes to the faith. The legends of Patrick are many: that he raised some 33 people from the dead and drove the snakes of Ireland into the sea. Another legend has Patrick explaining the Holy Trinity with the three-leaved shamrock.

Patrick, like Jesus, was one who would not let anything get in his way to go and tell others about the God, who through Christ had sustained him through his darkest days. That is what moved him through his life and allowed him to enter sometimes dangerous encounters with local chieftains and kings – the Herod’s of his own day.

This week’s attacks in the two mosques in New Zealand brought me back in an instant to a time in my life that was much more peaceful and idyllic. You see: I spent a year as a foreign

exchange student in Christchurch nearly 40 years ago. I remain in contact with the family lived with and my host brother messaged me yesterday that the attack at the first mosque was a mile away from his home, and the other mosque was only two blocks away from the nursing home my now elderly host-mother is living. Half way around the world people I know are shaken by this tragedy. It is a small, fragile world at times.

What can we do and feel when these things happen. We can go and tell the world that this renewed and stoked hatred of the other – Muslim, immigrant, Jewish, Gay & Lesbian, people of color – this hatred is not God’s way, or Jesus’ way or our way forward. The voices of fear and violence, and those who provoke and apologize for them must be challenged in our daily lives and drowned out.

In a world that can be filled with darkness, we turn to our faith for cover and protection. St. Patrick helps us. The saint’s legacy is a prayer of protection found in the hymn St. Patrick’s Breastplate, referring to the armor that soldiers wore in battle. The apostle Paul referred to putting on the armor of God. In Genesis (15:1) we hear that the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield.” We hear in our psalm today; The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27

Let us remember what surrounds and supports us.

This is the prayer of St. Patrick:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
 Christ behind me, Christ before me,
 Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
 Christ to comfort and restore me.
 Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
 Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
 Christ in hearts of all that love me,
 Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

We see how there is no space for the absence or any distance of Christ in our lives.

You and I may never see visions to venture forth and convert entire peoples to the faith. We may never be hounded by the authorities and threatened with our lives. God willing, we never experience tragedy on the global stage.

There is holy work to be done. Waking up each new day and giving thanks. Moving out into our world knowing that we are not alone. With, within, behind, before, beside: we are accompanied and loved by God in Christ in ways we may never know.