

John 16:16-20, 33

¹⁶ Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." ¹⁷ At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸ They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying." ¹⁹ Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'?" ²⁰ Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ...³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Two weeks ago I asked our kids to look for examples of the Kingdom of God, and I challenged them to share those sightings on our FB site. They did a marvelous job! So, basking in the warm sunlight of victory I got a follow up idea: Last Sunday, in my children's message I challenged the kids to look for examples of good news! So, this week the W.H.O. declared the corona virus a pandemic. The President declared a National Emergency. The Gov. of Michigan declared that all public school will be closed. The Bishop declared that all UMCs will stop meeting for at least 3 weeks. And I do declare! I couldn't have picked a worse week to ask the kids to look for examples of "good news"

One caveat - when I broke the news to my teenage son that school had been cancelled for 3 weeks - he let out the most joyful noise I've heard out of him for years.

Nevertheless, this has been a tough week for many people. Our lives have been upended by something beyond our control, and that something, namely the Covid 19 corona virus is scaring many, and threatening the lives of many worldwide. It's the reason I'm appearing before you electronically, rather than in person.

My initial reaction to a myriad of cancellations: Pro B-Ball, NHL hockey, NCAA basketball March Madness Tournament - was that it was probably an overreaction. Then the schools cancelled, and then the Bishop cancelled - and I carefully listened to what epidemiologists were saying about the pandemic. I am thoroughly convinced that precautions taken NOW, will translate into lives saved overall - and that is worth any inconveniences that we may incur.

We are a couple week into my sermon series on "Promises of Faith", and providentially this week's sermon offers us a very timely word. Jesus promises us that: "In this world you will have troubles, but take heart I have overcome the world."

We need to hear and digest both parts of that sentence: "In this world you will have troubles, - Jesus does not ignore that, He does not deny that. He does not blame anyone else for those troubles, He names it for what it is - "In this world you will have troubles". That's the honest truth He tells His disciples - And that was true then, and that is still true today: In this world you will have troubles".

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He gives us the word that we all very much need to hear this week: "but take heart I have overcome the world." and that too, is the honest truth. This week we have faced a great deal of adversity - I've already named it enough - no sense wallowing in it, like a pig

wallow in mud. But I do want to make sure that you hear those two points: We will always have troubles in this world – some weeks they are greater than others – some years are greater than others. God knows our troubles. AND, there is a promise: “but take heart I have overcome the world.” In all honesty – It’s a whole lot more fun when we get to the overcoming part, than it is facing the adversity part. The remarkable Helen Keller observed: “Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”

Today I want to share the story of a boy who endured significant hardships, and overcame adversity – he didn’t know it at the time, but God was at work, through it all. The boy’s name was Patrick, and yes – he is THAT Patrick. Since St. Patrick’s Day is right around the corner, I thought I’d tell you a bit about the amazing life of St. Patrick, the beloved Saint of Ireland.

There are a few surprises: He did not drive all the snakes out of Ireland as folklore tells. The biggest surprise for me was that St. Patrick was not Irish at all, he was English! Imagine that. Patrick was the son of a Christian Roman soldier living in England.

So, to be clear, there is no historical proof that: St. Patrick ever pinched anybody who wasn’t wearing green on March 17. Or that he held a parade on that day. Or that he dyed a river the color green. Or that he consumed lots of any particular green beverage.

Let me tell you what we do know about St. Patrick. At age 16 Patrick was abducted from his seaside village *in England* by some pagan Irish raiders. He was taken to Ireland and sold into slavery. As a slave he was responsible for taking care of animals – during this time when he was treated no better than those animals. Patrick found some comfort in the prayers that he had learned as a child. He began praying those prayers constantly, and he looked for an opportunity to escape. And, after 6 yrs as a slave, Patrick did escape. He made a risky dash of 200 miles across Ireland to a seaport, where he somehow found passage on a ship back to England.

Patrick returned to the delight of his family who had given him up for dead. Patrick was no longer the carefree youth of 16, he was now a man. Patrick was a serious, strong spiritual man, whose faith was forged in the adversity of cruel slavery, bearing terrible scars from his ordeal.

He entered the priesthood and was preparing for this calling at a monastery. He had some sense that his life had been spared for some Divine purpose, that his suffering and deliverance would be used by God. Patrick began having dreams in which Irish voices were calling to him, “We beseech thee to come and walk once more among us.” And for Patrick, this was the calling he was looking for. His superiors resisted the idea, Ireland was still a hostile, pagan place - a very dangerous place to be a missionary. In time, Patrick rose in the hierarchy of the priesthood, becoming a Bishop. It was then that Patrick chose to return to Ireland for the sake of Christ.

He wandered as a missionary in Ireland for 30 years, and they were amazingly fruitful years. In only 10 years, Patrick had established a network of churches and monasteries. In the span of his 30 years he baptized tens of thousands of new believers, and ordained hundreds of priests. St. Patrick was one of the greatest evangelists in history. He didn’t so much drive the snakes out of Ireland, he converted them to Christ. The truth is, St. Patrick transformed Ireland from a brutal pagan wilderness, to a stronghold of the Christian faith - *amazing....*

St. Patrick's greatness can be attributed to his willingness to follow Christ at any cost, *even* when it meant going back into the land where he was held in slavery.

St. Patrick was used greatly by God, because he was ready, and willing to be used by God.

He had one clear focus, that is revealed in this famous prayer of St. Patrick:

“Christ be with me,

Christ before me,

Christ behind me....

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.” – St. Patrick of Ireland

What a wonderful prayer.

To have a heart's desire to have all who encounter you, see and hear Christ revealed.

Patrick was wise enough to realize that when Christ is revealed in genuine love, even the pagans are drawn closer and become transformed. St. Patrick understood another key principle: he made himself fully available for God's use, and that's how God, so often, chooses to get something done.

When God needed someone to begin God's people - to be keepers of the promise:

God lifted up Abraham and Sarah.

When God needed a clever leader, smart and strategic,

God chose Jacob – to reform, and shape into a man of faith.

When God needed a visionary to save and preserve God's people,

God lifted up a dreamer, Joseph – who saw providence in his adversity,

And he showed extraordinary mercy and grace.

When God needed someone to liberate & lead the people from captivity in Egypt,

God lifted up Moses.

For 40 years Moses enjoyed status and privilege as a prince of Egypt,

Then for 40 years Moses served as a shepherd in the wilderness,

It must have seemed to him to be a dead end – this is my life now,

But it was preparation time for something more.

Moses would lead God's people to freedom,

and he would guide them in the wilderness for the next 40 years.

When God needed someone to lead the people into the promise land,

God lifted up Joshua.

When God needed a faithful leader for nation,

God looked past the impressive sons of Jesse,

and called the youngest, a shepherd boy named David.

When God needed someone to speak the truth in love to the wayward people,

God called a prophet, and another prophet, and another prophet,

Each played a role in the centuries-long struggle to reform the nation.

When God needed earthly parents to raise, nurture, and protect the Messiah,

God raised up Mary and Joseph for that awesome role.

When God needed a leader for the church,

someone who was earnest and humble enough for anyone to relate to,

God lifted up a fisherman named Peter.

When God needed someone to take the gospel message beyond the Holy Lands,
God reformed a Pharisee named Paul – transforming his life,
and beginning the transformation of the Roman world.

And when God needed someone to take the Gospel message
to the wild and pagan island of Ireland,
God raised up an English boy named Patrick,

Who by saying “Yes” to God, transformed the emerald island forever.

Throughout history, in many times and places, God has raised up faithful, willing men and women, to accomplish what needed to be done. I have cited the BIG examples from scripture, but there is more, far more to consider – important, but often never considered. The connections that we so often take for granted, are part of the intended blessings of God.

If you are a wife or mother – you are called to a special trust – a role that has significance and consequence. If you are a husband or father– you likewise have a sacred trust. Each of us, as believers in the message of Christ – is called by God to be “an Ambassador for Christ”. You have a witness in your workplace, in your neighborhood, in your community, God called YOU, entrusted you with that task.

We began the message with Jesus’ promise: “In this life you will have troubles, but take heart – I have overcome the world.” I want to share with you, from the Apostle Paul, who faced great adversity, and was even more greatly blessed by God, what it meant to him that Christ had overcome the world

From his letter to the Romans chapter 8:31, 35, 37-39

“³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors thru him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Nothing.

I want to close this message with another prayer from the pen of St. Patrick:

“May the strength of God pilot us,
May the power of God preserve us,
May the wisdom of God instruct us,
May the hand of God protect us,
May the way of God direct us,
May the shield of God defend us,
May the host of God guard us against the snares of evil
and the temptations of the world. Amen.”