

2 Lent, Celtic Service Luke 13:31-35
Christ and Grace March 17, 2019
Robin Teasley

Today is the feast of St. Patrick, which we associate with shamrocks and green beer, pots of gold and corned beef and cabbage – but before all that, the feast of St. Patrick was set aside as a holy day to remember this saint who was originally from Britain, not Ireland.

Born at the end of the 4th century, Patrick was raised in a Christian family but was captured by Irish slave traders when he was about 16. He was taken to Ireland and forced to work as a shepherd for six years until he managed to escape and return to Britain. After becoming a priest and then a bishop he was called by God in a vision to return to Ireland as a missionary. He first converted the kings and then their tribes, baptizing thousands. He erected churches on sites already known to be sacred, and had crosses carved on old druid pillars.

From his writings, we know that Patrick was steeped in scripture and that the Apostle Paul was his inspiration to convert others to follow Christ. To be so passionate about making disciples that he would return to the very people who had made him a slave, tells us something about Patrick. How willing are we to go to the very people we least love or respect to share with them the love of God? No one can do this without relying on the grace of God's great love and vulnerability.

Jesus describes this kind of love and vulnerability with the image of a mother hen protecting her chicks, willing to stand her ground with her wings spread, even as this very action exposes her breast to predators, to those who would harm her.

If you have ever loved someone this much, then you can begin to understand the depth of Jesus' love for the people of Jerusalem; you begin to understand Patrick's love for the people of Ireland. When you have loved someone this much, perhaps you can begin to understand the love God has for each of us – the love God has for Christians, Jews, Muslims, and all those made in the image of God who have not yet heard of such a loving God.

Whenever we love someone this much, all we can do is open our arms. We cannot make anyone walk into them. And when we weep and long for others to come to the love of God, to cease the anger, hate and killing, we cry out in lament as Jesus did. And then we open our arms and we bare our hearts, trusting in God's

wondrous love. It's a vulnerable place to be, but if we belong to God, then this is how we stand in this hurting world. Amen.