



The Desire of Jesus

Luke 13:31-35

March 17, 2019

Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read Luke 13:31-35

Special Music by Marie

Today is St Patrick's Day. How many of you have Irish blood in you? My father's father name was McGloughlin, so I am a quarter Irish.

Millions of people will celebrate St Patrick's Day today. Many people will wear green and drink green beer. There will be parades. Chicago will dye its river green. I just read about the man who dyes the river green. His name is Tom Rowan, and he has been doing it for 56 years. How he does it is a family secret recipe, and of course, environmentally friendly.

Most people do not know the real reason why they celebrate St Patrick's Day. Why don't they just call it Irish Day? Why St Patrick's Day? Who is St Patrick? Today I am going to tell you his story.

It has to do with the desire of Jesus.

That desire of Jesus is seen in our scripture passage today. Jesus is grieving over Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem had a rocky relationship with God. God desired a relationship with them and wanted them to be a light to other nations so others could know God. But the people walked away from God, over and over again. And over and over again, God continually called them back by sending prophets to speak God's words. And as the passage says, Jerusalem responded by stoning and killing those prophets. Even Herod wants to kill Jesus, who was considered a prophet.

And what does Jesus say? “O Jerusalem, I have longed [or desired] to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...” Think of that image. Hens are fiercely protective of their chicks. They will growl, shriek, puff out their feathers and peck at anyone that might get her chicks. What do the chicks do? They will often scatter, running away from those protective wings.

That word longing or desire is a strong word. It is a rare word in the Gospel of Luke. It appears only one other time when Jesus is the subject. It appears the night before Jesus’ death. He sits with his disciples around a table and says, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you.” And what happens? He will be betrayed and denied by those whom he desired to eat and connect with, just like those prophets of old that were betrayed by Jerusalem.

God’s desire to be with us is a great theme of the Bible. It starts from the very beginning when Adam and Eve hide from God, and the longing of God is echoed in God’s words, “Where are you?” The desire of God is in the covenant God makes with Abraham to be the people of God. The desire of God is in the words of the prophets who try to bring the people back to God: “Return to me,” God says, “that I may return to you.” (Zechariah 1:3). It is echoed in the crazy shepherd leaving 99 sheep to go after the one who is lost. It’s the love-struck father running out of the house to welcome home his prodigal son.

The desire of God is seen in baptism. God claims us, marks us as His own; the desire of God to be in relationship with us.

And what do we do? We often act like those chicks. We scatter. We hide. We resist. We flee. We go our own way. Yet, God continually seeks us out. There is a poem called “The Hound of Heaven” by Francis Thompson, which describes the God who never stops calling to us. How often I have desired to gather you and you were not willing? God desires us. Have you ever thought of God in that way?

And Jesus weeps over all those who turn their backs on his love.

All of this leads me to St Patrick.

His story begins in the late fourth/early fifth century. Patrick lived at the edge of the Roman Empire in northeastern England. When he was 16 years old, he was captured by a band of Celtic pirates from Ireland, who were conducting raids in that part of England. Once in Ireland, Patrick was sold to a tribal chief, who put Patrick to work as a slave herding cattle in the hills.

It was lonely and dangerous work. He was given little food or clothing and was constantly exposed to the elements. It was at this time that Patrick began to pray to God whom he had ignored growing up.

Patrick writes: "After I reached Ireland I used to pasture the flock each day and I used to pray many times a day. More and more did the love of God, and my fear of him and faith increase....I used to stay out in the forests and on the mountain and I would wake up before daylight to pray in the snow, in icy coldness, in rain, and I used to feel neither ill nor any slothfulness, because, as I now see, the Spirit was burning in me at that time."

Patrick became a devote Christian and his captors began to notice a change in him. At the same time, he began to identify with the very people who enslaved him. He learned their language, their culture, their religion. He began to love them, the ones who enslaved him.

Patrick was a slave for 6 years. One night he had a dream where a voice said, "You are going home. Look! Your ship is ready."

He woke up the next morning and walked 200 miles to the seacoast. He negotiated his way on board a ship and eventually made his back home to England.

Shortly after he rejoined his family, he had another vision where he heard another voice that said, "We beg you, holy youth, that you shall come and shall walk again among us." Patrick believed he was being called to go back and "walk among" the very people who enslaved him.

He studied for the priesthood and got permission to go back to Ireland despite the protests of his family and church superiors.

The task ahead of him was difficult. It was a violent and superstitious culture. But Patrick knew them well, and had in his soul a burning desire to bring these people a new hope and new future by telling them of the love of God.

Legend has it that in order to teach about the Trinity, Patrick would pick a shamrock – a three-leaf clover – and use it to describe how God is one and three at the same time. This is why you see the Shamrock on St Patrick's day. It is even in our picture of St Patrick on the front of the bulletin.

Patrick founded 700 churches and monastic communities in Ireland. Patrick's ministry transformed Ireland. By the end of Patrick's life, the slave trade disappeared in Ireland.

Amazing story, isn't it?

God sent Patrick back to Ireland because God had a desire, a longing, to be in relationship with that people, to gather them to himself. This is why we celebrate St Patrick's Day. And most people have no idea. I hope you can share St Patrick's story with others today.

The story continues: God still comes, God still invites, God still seeks us, longs for us, weeps for us, desires us. It is simply the heart and character of God to do these things, for God to gather us as a hen gathers her chicks.

And we can hide, resist or flee. But God's desire for us remains. We cannot deter it.

So what do we do? We yield to that desire of God. To admit our dependence and take shelter under God's wings. And maybe we will discover that what we have been longing for is the One who has been longing after us. We have been made in His image, you know. As Augustine said, "You made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

May you find rest in the One who longs for you. May you trust fully in the protective love of God. May you find the faith to be willing to let Jesus do what he has so long desired to do in you. This Lent, may you experience the desire of God for you.

I end with the words from the song Marie sang a few minutes ago:

Who am I, that the lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt?
Who am I, that the bright and morning star
Would choose to light the way
For my ever wandering heart?

Not because of who I am
But because of what you've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who you are