

Connecting Through Christ (CTC)
Small group ministry discussion questions

March 16-17, 2019

Second Reading: Philippians 3:17-4:1

1. Paul points out how unbelievers think and live. How do such descriptions serve as a blessing for believers as they seek to make Godly choices in their walk of faith?

2. Our citizenship is in heaven; soon Jesus will come down from heaven. How do such mercies help us resist temptation?

Sermon: Luke 13:31-35

1. At the end, Jesus warned that Jews of his day would not see him as he really is until he came in glory on the Last Day. How did Jesus' warning serve as a call to repentance and faith?

2. Perhaps the Pharisees warning to Jesus about Herod was meant to intimidate him and detract him from his mission. From what sources could Christians receive intimidation today as they seek to carry out their God given missions in life?

3. St. Patrick was a "hero of faith" for his selfless service and witness to the pagans who had kidnapped him. Do you have any stories of "heroes of faith" – from past or present, famous or not, who have inspired you?

4. How does reflecting on Jesus' uncompromising mission inspire you? Encourage you? Calm you?

Notes on Luke 13:31-35

Luke 13:31-35 begins with a warning from the Pharisees for Jesus about Herod's plan to kill him, but it becomes a reflection on the nature of Jesus' life and mission (which reach their ultimate goal in his death) and then on the tragic role played by Jerusalem in the life of Jesus and other prophets.

The passage invites Christians today to reflect on the meaning of Jesus' life and death and on the role we play in the continuing mission of Jesus.

The Pharisees and Herod

It is difficult to evaluate the motives of the Pharisees in the story. It is also difficult to evaluate whether or not their warning is either sincere or representative of a real threat. As in all the Gospels, the Pharisees in Luke are largely antagonistic to Jesus and Jesus to them. There are hints, however, of a more positive reception by the Pharisees. In 7:36 and 14:1, for instance, Pharisees invite Jesus into their homes (although the scenes do not play out well for them), and in Acts 15:5 we hear that some Pharisees had actually become Christians. We thus cannot dismiss the Pharisees' motives as necessarily being negative.

On the other hand, their report seems problematic: Luke 9:7-9 and 23:8 suggest Herod's interest in Jesus was not in killing him, and when given the chance to condemn Jesus in the Passion account, Herod refuses to do so (23:6-12).

Jesus' Death a Part of His Mission

Whatever the purposes of the Pharisees and Herod, Jesus uses the threat to make clear the nature of his upcoming death as a part of his mission. Jesus is going to die, but it will have nothing to do with the threat of Herod. Rather, his death is the completion of his present ministry.

To reinforce that Herod has no control over him, Jesus adds that he will be doing these things "today *and tomorrow*" (verse 32, emphasis added).

When Jesus follows this statement about "today and tomorrow" by saying that "on the third day I finish my work," it is perhaps not apparent from these words alone what he means. Indeed, the reference to "the third day" probably sounds to most readers like a reference to the resurrection. Perhaps the resurrection is meant to be included, but the following verse makes it clear that it is his death that Jesus primarily has in mind: "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" (verse 33).

The important point to note is that Jesus' death is in continuity with the rest of his ministry -- "today," "tomorrow," and "the third day" go together. Jesus' death is not of a fundamentally different character than his ministry while he was alive: They are all about establishing the kingdom of God. Holding together Jesus' life and death helps us to make better sense of both.

Jerusalem: A Tragic Role

Jesus has been journeying to Jerusalem since 9:51, a journey that lasts all the way through 19:28 in Luke's Gospel (often referred to as Luke's "Journey Narrative"). Jesus' mention of his death there leads him to reflect on the tragedy that Jerusalem had been in Israel's past and will be in Jesus' future, even though its role is a necessary one, as the end of verse 33 makes clear.

Patricius ("St. Patrick") 389-461 A.D.

Though touted nowadays as a Roman Catholic saint, Patrick really lived before the time that a lot of current Roman doctrine had developed which separates Rome from Protestantism. He seems to have believed decidedly against the doctrine of *salvation by works* or merit, being an *anti-Pelagian* (Pelagius taught the heresy that Christ hadn't done enough for us). Moreover, he was really more of a "Gallican catholic" than a "Roman catholic," having studied theology in Gaul (France), which, at that time, was somewhat independent of Rome in church matters and worship ritual. In fact, Patrick never mentions a Pope in his writings, nor does he appeal to tradition for establishing doctrines (as the Roman Catholic church does); rather he seems to recognize the Scriptures as the sole authority for matters of faith.

Patrick was probably born in Roman Britain (when the Roman Empire still controlled Britain). His father was a deacon and magistrate named *Calpornius*. His grandfather was a presbyter (church worker). The details of Patrick's life are disputed and overlaid with many pious legends. What is known for sure comes from two writings which he left. In his largest writing, his *Confessions* (written in an ancient Irish-Latin), he begins:

I, Patrick, a sinner, the rudest and the least of all the faithful, and the most contemptible with the multitude, had for my father Calpornus, a deacon and the son of Potitus (or Photius), a presbyter who lived in the village of Bannavem of Tabernia; for he had a cottage in the neighbor-hood where I was captured. I was about, then, 16 years old. But I was ignorant of the true God and was led away into captivity to Hibernia (Ireland).

At the age of 16 (405 A.D.), while staying on his father's farm, Patrick was seized by raiders and sold as a slave in Ireland. For six years he served as a herdsman for a pagan Irish chieftain in Ulster. It was during that enslavement time that the Lord reached Patrick's soul. Patrick does not state how he was "converted." However, having grown up knowing what the Christian faith teaches, he would have at least learned the basic teachings of Scripture. God then used his teenage enslavement to knock home to him a believing understanding of all this. Thus Patrick wrote:

Every day I fed cattle, and frequently during the day I prayed. More and more the love and fear of God burned, and my faith and my spirit were strengthened so that, in one day, I said as many as a hundred prayers, and nearly as many in the night.

After six years of service as a shepherd, he escaped to the Continent (Gaul) and eventually reached home again at the age of 22 (411 A.D.). But, deep down inside his soul he became convinced that he must return and evangelize Ireland. Once, in a dream, he claims to have heard the voice of the Irish calling: *We beseech you to come and walk among us once more.*

To prepare himself for that task, he studied in the monastery of Lerins, on an island off the southeast coast of France, where he was then ordained circa 417 A.D. (28 years old). Patrick also went to Auxerre, France, where he spent 15 years of service and studied religion under Saint Germanus, a French bishop. His first nomination as bishop to Ireland was rejected because of a certain sin in his youth. Also, because Patrick's earlier education had been a bit inadequate, his religious superiors were reluctant to let him return to Ireland as a missionary.

That changed when Palladius, the first Irish missionary bishop, died in 431 A.D. Patrick was then commissioned the following year (He was then 42 or 43). He spent 30 years serving the Lord there until he died.

Patrick began his work in northern and western Ireland, where no one had ever preached Christianity. He gained the trust and friendship of several tribal leaders and soon made many converts. He secured toleration for Christians amid a country filled with Druids, Wiccans, Animists, and other nature-oriented beliefs. He also developed a native clergy, fostered the growth of asceticism (monestary-type living), established dioceses, and held church councils. Though not well-educated, he encouraged learning. Emphasizing the priority of mission work to the Celts (pronounced Kelts), those who followed him went on to evangelize western Europe throughout the 500's and 600's. Patrick is said to have founded more than 300 churches and baptized more than 120,000 people.

The center of his endeavors was Armagh. He wrote:

I am greatly a debtor to God who has bestowed His grace so largely upon me that multitudes were born again to God through me. The Irish, who never had the knowledge of God and worshipped only idols and unclean things have lately become the people of the Lord and are called sons of God!

Legend claims that Patrick used the three-leafed shamrock as a “tool” to teach the pagans about the Trinity, and there are differing versions of his purported breastplate” (or “Shield”) which defines the Trinity and his allegiance to Him. Also, the unique Celtic Cross became his standard for representing Christ.

Tradition says that he developed this as a means of refocusing the beliefs of the pagan Irish upon the real God. In many places the sun and moon were considered sacred and, therefore, common pagan worship symbols. So Patrick incorporated the cross upon an orb as a means to “syncretize” their belief, yet point them to the true God.

Patrick would likely be appalled at how his “feast day” is celebrated nowadays by so many in America, using it as an excuse for carousing and excessive drinking. In contrast, many in Ireland spend the day in quiet spiritual contemplation and worship. He would likely be dismayed that his great goal in life—to bring Jesus Christ to the unbelievers and pagans—has been overlooked in most American celebrations in favor of “inoffensive” things like leprechauns, clovers, green beer, or corned beef and cabbage (though such things may certainly be enjoyed in moderation 😊).

Patrick is an example for you and me to consider as far as determination in spreading the Gospel. His life experiences showed him how precious Jesus was so that he felt compelled to help others hear and understand the Savior of the world.

His two writings: During his later years he wrote *Confessions*, an account of his spiritual development (you can find it on the Web). In the book, Patrick expressed his humility and thankfulness that God called him to serve the Irish. He also wrote *Letter to Coroticus* in which he criticized a raid on Ireland conducted by Coroticus, a British chieftan; several of Patrick's converts were killed in the raid. The letter also shows Patrick's resentment of the scornful attitude by the British clergymen and nobility towards the Irish.

Snakes? – His purported driving of snakes out of Ireland is pious legend. There are no snakes native to Ireland. It does remind one of Genesis 3, where the Devil came to this world in a snake to deceive and mislead mankind away from God. Considering how Hibernia (Ireland) had been dominated by the Druids, Wiccans, & Animists (i.e. Harry Potter-type religions), the snake story does depict Christianity getting rid of the power of the Devil over the hearts of the Irish.

Other

The St. Patrick's Day commemoration came to America in 1737 when it was first publicly celebrated in Boston.

