

Today is St. Patrick's day. I've got on my green tie. My green socks, and my green pants. I am ready for St. Patrick's day. But what is St. Patrick's Day all about? Why should we care?

When it comes to St. Patrick it is hard to separate the actual man from the many legends about him. Much of what we know comes from Patrick's autobiography, the *Confessio*. Patrick was a late fourth early fifth century Romano-British Christian missionary to Ireland, and Bishop in Ireland. He is the primary St. of Ireland. According to Patrick's autobiography, Patrick grew up a not very religious boy until at sixteen he was captured by Irish pirates and sold into slavery. For the next six years Patrick tended a herd of sheep and prayed. One day God told Patrick how to escape and he did. Once back in England Patrick went on to become a cleric and then a priest. The Lord called out to Patrick again. This time Patrick was to return to Ireland. His purpose was to convert the pagan Celts. This much we are pretty sure is fact. Now, here come the legends.

Patrick would walk the Irish countryside with a tall staff that held a lantern. Patrick would also ring a bell to let people know he was coming and that they could hear the word of God or possibly be baptized into the family of God. Patrick set up churches, ordained priests and built up communities of Christian faith in Ireland. It is said Patrick took advantage of the Irish pagan fondness for the number three by using a three leaf clover to explain how God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit could each be individuals – like the leaves of the clover, and part of the same single plant. Patrick used existing symbols to explain Christianity to the unbelieving Celts. On one such occasion Patrick was preaching near a rock with a large circle drawn on it. Clearly the circle had been drawn as a part of Celtic worship to represent the moon or the sun. Patrick painted a big cross in the middle of the circle, thus creating the first Celtic Cross. This created the ground work for Patrick to use existing pagan symbols to ease the transition to the Gospel. The most popular legend about St. Patrick is he ran the snakes out of Ireland.

Now, you might be thinking, this is all fun information, but what does it have to do with Philip in this morning's text. (pause) Well. At it turns out; quite a bit. Philip was also called by God and sent to a specific place; the desert road south of Jerusalem heading to Gaza (8:26). Philip also followed God's guidance to use what was present to reach to the Ethiopian eunuch to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Eunuch was reading aloud from the Scroll of Isaiah. Philip, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, begins with a simple question. Do you understand what you are reading? Do you understand? (pause) Honestly Church, sometimes I wonder how well we understand. Do we understand what is most important? Do we understand what it truly means to follow the way of Jesus Christ; more than that, to follow the way of God. The passage the eunuch was reading aloud was this;

"As a sheep led to the slaughter
or a lamb before its shearer is dumb,
So he opens up not his mouth.
In his humiliation justice was denied him
who can describe this generation?"
For his life is taken up from the earth" (Acts 8:32-33 RSV).

The Eunuch did not understand whom the passage was speaking about. Was the prophet speaking about himself or was the prophet speaking about another? Philip knew the answer. (pause) Church, do you know the answer? (pause). Do you know whom the prophet Isaiah was talking about? (pause for the expected reply of Jesus) Yes. That's right. Philip tells the Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus. The Eunuch is touched by the Holy Spirit. As the caravan comes near water the Eunuch says to Philip, "See, here is water! What is to prevent me from being

baptized? The eunuch called for the chariot to stop. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch stop down into the water and Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch.

Philip listened and followed God's directions to the Ethiopian eunuch on his way to back to Ethiopia. St. Patrick followed God's direction to freedom from slavery, and then again to the country where Patrick had been a slave. When Patrick and Philip followed God's directions new people came to believe in Jesus Christ, and the people in that household were also saved. When we follow God's directions people are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Whole families are saved. Thousands of people come to Jesus.

My question for all of us is are we listening for God's direction? (pause) What is God saying to all of us? (pause) When we hear God will we respond by doing what God says, or will we say, "No. I want to do my own thing?" (pause) My sisters and brothers here's the truth. God is calling you all the time. God never stops calling out to us. God never stop reassuring us. God never stops remind us of who we are. God never stops reminding us when we feels useless; worthless; unwanted; not needed; God never stops remind us we were created for a purpose. God wants us. God loves us. Amen? **Amen!** Amen?! **Amen!!** We were created to grow in our relationship with God by caring for one another and caring for God's creation. Amen? **Amen!** That's the call! Amen? **Amen!** (pause) How will we respond? (pause) We are Methodists. When weird stuff happens we are to follow the Wesley Quadrilateral to figure it out. We are to look to Scripture, Tradition, our Experience and our Reason. Scripture tells us Philip obeyed God and the Ethiopian Eunuch was saved, baptized and took the Gospel to the queen's court in Ethiopia. We have this tradition that St. Patrick obeyed God's calling and he was the greatest missionary to Ireland – ever. John Wesley obeyed God's calling and left such a legacy that we can call ourselves Methodists today. However, when people do not obey God's call to love God; love one another, and care for God's creation really bad things happen.

Children are neglected and abused. People are exploited by those using, making, selling and distributing drugs. People are exploited by sex traffickers who abduct and abuse young people all over the world – including in the U.S. The elderly are left to rot in nursing homes. The poor are left to freeze, starve and die in the elements. We elect people who do not know God's Word because we have decided God's Word is no longer important. We no longer pray as we should. We no longer search the Scriptures as we should. We go to Sunday school and stuff the book, the Sunday school book, in the cushions because we aren't going to read it this week. (pause) The result is there is no one to stand up against hate. There is no one to preach God's love. The message of God's grace becomes as lost in the world as it is in us.

The result is hate groups like the KKK and Neo-Nazis, and religious extremists like the Taliban are on the rise. Fifty Muslims were injured in two Mosques. Thirty four are still in the hospital. Twelve are in critical condition. One, a four year old girl, has been rushed to a children's hospital where she remains in critical condition. (pause) My God, my God. What do we do? (pause) Has God been speaking to you to speak out against hate? Has God been speaking to you to reach out to people in our community with whom you are uncomfortable? Are you hearing God's call to stand up against bullying, prejudice, and clickishness with love and hospitality? (pause) No? (pause) Well, church, then let us stick to the call. Let us devote ourselves to growing in our relationship with God until we hear God's call upon our lives clearly. Let us devote ourselves to the means of grace. Let us respond with love and compassion when hear about the death of our neighbors, or our friend's family. Let us offer sincere compassion instead of patented answers. The Holy Spirit is calling us to love God by serving others. How will we respond? (pause) How will we respond?

Let us respond in the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen