

March, 2010

Finding Sight

Sometimes we think we can see for miles and miles. On good days, we feel smarter than most people. When the winds are blowing right, we believe we can seize everything the street has to offer; few things escape our perusal. The last thing we would consider ourselves as being -- is blind.

Think about it. We usually see what we want to see and hang with those who reinforce our beliefs. We look for that which is familiar; we subtly steer clear of things that are new. Over time, if we are not careful, our vision narrows and our world becomes very small.

But thankfully, God is in the business of opening our eyes, giving us the immeasurable gifts of objectivity and sanity. Without God's Spirit working in our lives, it is very difficult to have a healthy understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Our hearts and minds can fill with darkness without the light of faith illuminating our way.

One person who had a large world, illuminated path, and strong vision was Saint Patrick. He was an Englishman who was taken captive as a slave by unruly Celts from Ireland during the late Fourth Century. Yet, by God's grace, Patrick managed to escape and returned to safety in England. While you and I might be inclined under similar circumstances to never set foot on Irish soil again, Patrick defied the odds.

He not only returned to Ireland, but he brought with him his newly developed Christian faith. Patrick was one of the greatest missionaries. In many ways, he set the standard for all missionaries who came after him.

Patrick was bold and innovative. Ireland was not yet under Roman control and the established, Latin-styled church of the day considered Celtic people to be wild, unpredictable beasts, not worth its time. But that did not deter Patrick. He got in a boat and walked onto the Irish shore without fear. His motto was, "I have Christ in front of me, Christ behind me, and Christ over me." Patrick challenged the Celtic people to spiritual warfare, believing that his God was more powerful than theirs. And the results were phenomenal. As the saying goes, Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland.



Saint Patrick

However, what Patrick did more than anything else was contextualize the Gospel message for the Celtic people. Eventually, the Celtic Church emerged in great contrast to the Latin Church. From the Celtic culture came unique songs, lively and animated worship and women were given greater leadership. The Latin Church, meanwhile, was getting stricter marching orders from Rome and religious freedom was being stifled. Patrick was truly on the frontier, reaching people with the undeniable power of the Gospel. Hundreds of monastic communities sprang up in Ireland as a result.

Through Patrick's powerful ministry, the eyes of the Celtic people were opened. They saw that their blindness was not only killing them but had made them killers as well. Great Irish educational centers were birthed in the wake of the monastic communities' efforts to

promote the arts and learning. New Irish missionaries were sent to the far reaches of Europe, bringing the light of the Gospel to many darkened hearts and minds.

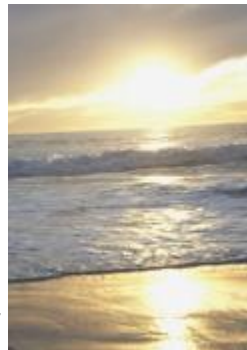
In recent years, I have had the privilege of working with a Saint Patrick-type missionary in Peru. His name is Dario Mesa, from Moyabamba, a city near the tributaries of the Amazon River in northern Peru. Dario is indigenous from the Aguaruna people. Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship has been helping Dario in his passion to establish the Gospel among the Aguaruna. Presbyterian doctors, educators and other volunteers from the United States have worked with Dario in his efforts to provide greater health care, schools, training and places of worship for his people.



Dario is tireless, driven by a deep desire for his people to know Christ within context of their original culture and language. For years, the Spanish-speaking Church of Peru has turned a blind eye to the Aguaruna, thinking they would somehow come to the bigger cities in northern Peru and learn about Jesus within the context of the Spanish language. But Dario was driven by a different vision. He lived to take the Gospel to his own people in their own language and culture.

In his endless missionary efforts, Dario has skirted death in flooded rivers filled with poisonous snakes. He has spent countless nights sleeping on the ground waiting for the next opportunity to continue his journeys upriver. He's been assaulted and nearly killed by robbers and people intent on stopping his mission. But over the last 20 years, Dario has stuck to his vision and the results have been phenomenal. There is now an updated translation of the New Testament in the Aguarunan language and efforts have begun to translate the Old Testament. Many small villages now have humble, wooden churches where people gather and worship. Peruvian health brigades now visit the Aguaruna people, bringing with them education and preventive care.

So like Saint Patrick and Dario, cry out to God in your prayers. Don't let your world get too small. Ask God to give you greater understanding of your surrounding world. Be brave and ask God to show you where you are blind. God is in the business of expanding our vision. People could be dying next door to you, but you might not have the eyes to see. Even you yourself might be suffocating from isolation in an increasingly reduced world, unable to stop the downward spiral. But, there is hope.



Remember the words of the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the people of Ephesus; "I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe...."(Ephesians 1:16-19a)

And in honor of that great missionary of long ago, have a blessed St. Patrick's Day.