

Will the Real St. Patrick Please Stand Up?

The river that flows through Chicago, Illinois, is about to become green once again. The annual celebration of St. Patrick's Day brings flowing toasts of green beer throughout America and strange rituals like this one. The Irish descendants of Chicago might go a little too far in their celebration of Irish heritage, but it still begs the question: Who was the real St. Patrick, and what are we really celebrating?

I first arrived on Irish shores at the age of 22 as a young, idealistic missionary and evangelist. I soon realized I had a lot to learn—from the Irish.

One of my invitations was to join a leader named Raymond who had purchased a large bus called the "Tea Trawler" and turned its back into a portable stage. We would drive into poor areas or small towns and begin to worship God in praise from the platform to attract a crowd. Then I would bring an evangelistic message to those who had gathered, closing with an invitation to come into the bus, enjoy a cup of tea, discuss spiritual matters and receive prayer.

I remember one night I was preaching on the Ten Commandments, and a rude man from an upper window yelled at me, "This is the 11th Commandment: Thou shalt shut your [obscenity] mouth so we can go to sleep!" He then hurled a potato or some other vegetable at me. I continued preaching, in the love of God, anyway. Several people came in for a cup of tea and prayed to receive Christ that night.

It was a combination of bold witness and relational/conversational evangelism, and very much in the spirit of St. Patrick.

So who are we really celebrating on St. Patrick's Day?

We are celebrating a man of God who was an apostolic missionary and a bold preacher of Jesus. We are celebrating someone who introduced a whole new model of evangelism—relational/conversational evangelism—to a culture.

First, he was an apostolic missionary and bold preacher; he was not Irish!

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Yes, really.

He was originally from the region we now call England, taken captive as a teenaged slave to Ireland by raiders. He escaped slavery to freedom, only to feel a calling to ministry and return.

The Lord gave him a dream one night, and he saw the very people who once had held him captive calling him back over to help them and introduce them to Jesus.

In modern times, imagine you are German and living in Germany when you are taken captive by Hamas as a teenager. You escape from the terrorists only to return to Germany and be called by God to return to Palestine, giving your whole life as a missionary to the families of the terrorists. That was the real St. Patrick!

He trained in the south of France and began his mission in the north of Ireland. He wrote in his journal, "I felt no fear, because the Spirit of God was so fervent within me."

His bold preaching included sharing God's love everywhere by seeking out those who were steeped in spiritual darkness. People followed the cults of the Druids and their teachings

that “god” was angry with them. The ancient belief was that to appease god’s anger, one must sacrifice an animal or even a firstborn son.

The blood must be shed upon the altar, and then the priest would either drink the blood or pour it upon the land, and in that act they believed they became somehow one with god and that god would not be angry with them anymore.

Patrick and, for many centuries, other disciples of his who carried on the mission, brought the truth: God was not demanding these sacrifices out of anger.

The opposite is true, He took the initiative in sending His one and only Son to become a once-and-for-all sacrifice for them. Indeed, Christ offered His body and blood as the sin bearer, in love. “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NIV).

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And in being covered by His holy blood and receiving the power of His Holy Spirit released after Christ’s resurrection, you can truly become one with God forever.

Second, Patrick introduced the love of Jesus Christ through relational evangelism. The Roman model of the day was forced conversion to the state religion of Christianity. Think of Ireland not with large cities but small groupings of family units. Patrick and the monks would form communities, usually consisting of 12 monks, who would create a base of operation to pray, worship, grow food and give it away.

People were converted by this unique approach of having their felt needs met and also being welcomed in an atmosphere of the very presence of the high King of heaven through prayer and

worship. Just like the Tea Trawler!

Hallelujah!

I remember spending the night on the couch of a remarkable lady in Dublin, Lilian Rowe. She was all afire for Jesus. She owned a car, but so she could be active in evangelism, she hired a taxi every morning for work, just to give an earful of the gospel for 10 minutes to the taxi driver.

On her mantle, above her fireplace, was a picture of Bono of Irish supergroup, U2.

I asked her about it, and found out that she, and her husband, Chris, were one of the Christian influences for Bono himself, and helped disciple him in the faith in his early years before all the hit songs and records came.

I remember Lilian's passion for Jesus, which overflowed into her passion for the lost. This, too, was very "St. Patrick" in influence.

So, this weekend on St. Patrick's Day, and then leading forward into Easter, let's remember not St. Patrick, but Jesus Christ, whom Patrick preached, and whose blood was shed upon the cross as He offered God's once-and-for-all sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

Let's remember the examples like Raymond's Tea Trawler or Lilian Rowe, and all the lessons the Irish can teach us. Like becoming sold-out missionaries. Like joining in real communities of love and service. Like sharing the Good News in a relational fashion, whether that's over a cup of tea and prayer for others or simple conversations in taxis with co-workers or family members.{eoa}

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*for **Carl Wesley Anderson**'s new documentary, "Love Speaks Through St. Patrick," debuting this St. Patrick's Day weekend on DAYSTAR, GOD TV and FAITH TV.*