

**Hymn Meditation – “Be Thou My Vision”**  
**Philippians 3:7-14 and Matthew 28:16-20**  
**July 21, 2019**

If he had any idea a significant part of the world would have a holiday in his honor – Patrick of Ireland would likely turn green – all the more so if he knew how that “*holy day*” was observed! Ironic that a man whose sole vision was Jesus is remembered on a day when by supper time the vision of a lot of celebrators is getting quite blurry! Then again, Patrick was a missionary – sent to the Druids of Ireland – a roudy bunch to say the least, so a few folk getting silly on green beer would hardly disturb him.

A missionary, by official definition at least, is someone who enters an alien culture and presents the faith to unreached people. Missionaries have to be patient. Last time we talked about Fanny Crosby – who described herself as an evangelist. Evangelists are those folks I Peter describes as “*always ready to give a reason for the hope that lies within them*”. They’re like “first responders” because opportunities for sharing faith arise suddenly and may close quickly. But the missionary is the soldier for Jesus with orders to dig in.

I have a friend and former colleague – Pastor Mark Nygard, who with wife Linda were missionaries to the West African countries of Senegal and The Cameroon, in predominantly Muslim areas. If we measured success of our missionaries by conversions or baptisms, he and Linda would have been failures. I don’t know two people with hearts more after God’s heart, yet they once confided to me that for the most part their work with Muslims was unsuccessful and conversions rare.

That’s why this hymn dedicated to Patrick is so appropriate to his life. Missionaries are ambassadors for Jesus Christ who bring a vision of the world God intends to people who may not have heard of God at all, or not properly. The stanzas of this hymn are rife with meaning – Druids to whom Patrick was a missionary called their leaders “High Kings” – in some versions of this song that term is employed though in ours “Great King” is used. Druids erected “high towers” for their kings and subjects would be honored if ever invited to be sheltered in them.

Druids made ample use of fire in their religious rituals – as well as after victories in battle. Some even say the church’s custom of the Advent log or wreath may have origins in Druid religion. Patrick the missionary would have had to discover what these things meant, and turn them around to present the real light of the world to them, whose victory on the cross was their “true shelter”, its grace their inheritance. “*Be Thou My Vision*” is a missionary anthem, but also the personal testimony of a missionary - which is where we can enter the song if we choose.

You and I have thousands of thoughts every day, conscious and unconscious. Most are instinctual though no small number volitional, and of those, at least on our better days the honorable ones outnumber the dishonorable. Sad to say, a lot of our thoughts are trivial. We can’t stop our minds from creating them anymore than we can stop our hearts from beating. So for us, Patrick has bequeathed a prayer. Through it we ask God to capture our thoughts by the vision of his Son urging and cheering us on through our day – then escorting us to our rest at night. And his church, we who devote a lot of thought to creating programs and vision statements – for us Patrick’s prayer might save us a lot of effort, not to mention copy paper. It’s all about Jesus anyway. Let’s stand then, and pray...

