

Leave the Usual You Behind

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Jeremiah 31:33 But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day,” says the Lord. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

I have mentioned that we tend to react to situations and circumstances in an habitual fashion: we react with anger, or fear, or calm...whatever our particular habit is. That is what we would consider, and the people around us, to be our usual nature.

“I always get mad when that happens.” “It really bugs me when such and such happens.” “I always put off doing things.” “I never remember....”

We have a set of beliefs about ourselves that we have lived for so long that we have come to believe that is who we are. That is what we consider to be our usual self. When someone looks at us responding in our usual manner, they would nod their heads knowingly and tell us that is the usual ‘you’. We are behaving within a predictable pattern.

But God tells us something different. God has said that He has placed His instructions deep within us, and written them on our hearts. So when we move away from our pre-conceived beliefs, from our thoughts about who we think we are and

move into our hearts, we find God's instructions there; and they are different from the instructions we give ourselves. Our usual self is a lot like everyone else's usual selves. We usually react to change with fear and anxiety, and respond to an insult with anger or hurt. Then we usually return a hurt for a hurt, and react to inconvenience with impatience. These are all usual human responses and patterns. People expect and accept these responses under the given circumstances.

At most times, the instructions that God has written upon our hearts are obscure and barely legible: cloudy, and in Paul's words "For now we see through a glass, darkly." But we can still read them well enough to maintain a certain degree of respect for each other. We are civil, at the least.

But at other times, we succumb entirely to the downward pull of our earthly nature. We are nearly blind; seeing as the blind man states in the Bible, "I see people; they look like trees walking." Sometimes we allow our darkest emotions, ego, and lowest human responses to obscure our spiritual sight, and we behave in an utterly unacceptable and destructive manner.

It is easy to point our fingers, criticize and judge others during their times of darkness. This is the very reason why we need laws to protect ourselves against this sort of dark behavior. But at the same time, any one of us is capable of allowing some disturbing imbalance to penetrate our hearts and minds. In a flash, we are caught up in hatred and fear, and all of our pain, hurt, and intolerance spills out onto everyone around us.

Because we are human, we are capable of a wide range of emotions and behaviors.

Thank You God, that there are still other times when we exhibit a different reaction to life. Sometimes, we find that deep place of awareness where God has hidden His instructions. Occasionally, we move from our heads to our hearts and we implement these new instructions; and when we do, a new ‘you’ appears, an unusual you.

In Luke Chapter 5 we read of a fishing incident. Simon, John, and James had been fishing and had no luck. After speaking to a crowd, Jesus climbed onto the boat and said, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon did as he was instructed and caught so many fish the boat almost capsized.

It is easy and familiar to fish in the shallows, where it is the usual thing to do, where most people are fishing. It is safe and accepted to fish in these waters. After all, this is where you are supposed to fish. People won’t criticize you for not catching anything in these waters, because they didn’t catch anything either. People understand.

Yet Jesus gave the fishermen a new set of instructions...to go out into the deep; to look where most people would dare not look, to do what most would not do.

To reap the greatest harvest we must risk the greatest criticism, take the greatest chance, overcome our greatest resistance, express our greatest self. God is urging us to abandon what we think we are, based upon our past, and trust in the instructions God has written upon our heart.

These are the lessons on my heart this year regarding St. Patrick: to trust in God in all things, to release the image we have of ourselves, and dare to express our highest nature into Creation.

Born Maewyn Succat in 387 in Roman-Britian, he referred to himself as Patricius. The story goes that he was captured at the age of 16 from Britain by Irish pirates and enslaved in Ireland. Then at the age of 22 he was given a vision – an instruction written on his heart – to go to the coast. After a 200 mile walk he met some sailors who returned him to Britain and his family.

A few years later he was granted another vision. A man carrying many letters gave him one entitled “The Voice of the Irish”. He imagined that he heard the voice of Irish folk saying, “We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.”

Yet another instruction from God. This vision prompted him to become a priest, and he was consecrated as bishop at the age of 43. He returned to Ireland around 430 and began his mission of converting the Druids to Christianity.

While serving in Ireland, Bishops in his homeland began to question his qualifications to be a Bishop. They were referring to an unspecified act of egregious sin when he was a youth. His autobiographic writing entitled *Confession* is his response to this investigation, and where we gain the most information we know about St. Patrick. What we know is that Patricius placed his faith solely in God. He wrote: "Indeed he bore me up, though I was trampled underfoot in such a way. For although I was put down and shamed, not too much harm came to me."

He served God in Ireland for 40 plus years. It is difficult to separate the myth from truth about his life and his activities. The legend has it that he was humbled by his lack of education and turned to pictures in ways to teach, so he used the three-leaved shamrock to teach the Holy Trinity.

He allegedly drove the snakes from Ireland, which was not true. Ireland had no snakes to drive away. Some scholars believe that this reference is allegorical: St. Patrick drove the 'snakes' of false beliefs and ungodly activity, such as human sacrifice by the Druids out of Ireland.

The Druids were looked upon by the Catholic Church and the Romans as barbarians. The claim of human sacrifice has been under contention for many years now, and some scholars believe the early writings about the Druids are inaccurate. It is possible that the Druids were just a peace-loving intellectual

group of philosophers who got in the way of an Imperialistic expansion by the Romans.

But Patrick and his band of monks built over 300 churches and several monasteries, and baptized over 100,000 pagans. March 17 is claimed to be his day of death, and became the date of his feast. Some historians believe he died in 493, but all dates related to St. Patrick are speculative.

What's not speculative about St. Patrick is that he was all about doing God's work. He faced difficulties throughout his life with a faith and calm that God was directing him.

It is unusual to meet disaster with a calm knowing that God is present. It is unusual to react to insult with love, or to chaos with peace. It is unusual to speak positively about others with whom we disagree, or to take the time to help someone in need, or to donate money or our time to causes.

The deeper we look into our hearts, the more real and authentic we become - and the clearer are the instructions from God. Our unique talents and personalities are meant to bring good to people, to be used to help others. Like the fish the disciples caught and brought back to the people on shore, our abundance is for the benefit of others.

The more real we can be, the more true to our authentic selves we can be, the more unusual we become...and the more attractive to others. We are attracted to the unusual - unusual

land formations, unusual animals, flowers, sunsets, things out of the ordinary.

In the same way, we are attracted to people who respond with calm strength to disasters. We are fascinated by people who face complications with faith and confidence when others around them are filled with fear and doubt. We are attracted to the person who lives from their deeply placed God instructions rather than from the typical shallow human set of responses.

People who are being what they were meant to be and sharing their joy and authenticity with others are not found in the shallows. As Henry David Thoreau said, they “march to a different drummer.” They are not concerned with what anyone else is doing. Also, they are not purposely out of step just to prove that somehow they are different.

No, these rare individuals are simply attending to their own set of instructions as God has outlined for them on their hearts. If they follow the crowd – so be it. If they are flowing directly against the current – so be it. God is their polestar, not humankind.

We have two choices every time we face a situation: Push off into the deep and reap the awaiting abundance, or stay in the safety of the shallows and have what humanity tells us what we should have.

Are we casting our nets of spiritual awareness into the deep – trusting God, aligning with the God presence within, allowing our awareness of the Christ within to expand and illumine our thoughts and lives? Or are we taking the path of least resistance and ignoring the inner call from God? Are we staying close to shore, timidly doing what everyone else is doing, because - if everyone is doing it, it must be right?

I challenge you today to delve intensely into your own hearts and find the instructions that God has placed there; to cast out into the deep and forgo the comfort and safety of the earthly shallows. I challenge you to leave the usual you behind, and look within to draw out the unusual you, and accept God's divine abundance of peace, prosperity, wisdom, strength, joy, and love that await you.

Let us pray...