

We are Sent to Go out with Christ's Message of Peace Luke 10:1-12

What are the possibilities and the potential for any follower of Christ who picks up the word of God and reads it, meditating on the word, allows it to permeate deep within, to find true meaning and application for themselves in their own life, their family, community, church or even the world. The word of God is living and active, and if we are open and attentive and willing to both listen to what God might say to us, and then apply to our lives by going out and doing what he says, then in a sense, I believe in that old saying that, 'the world is your oyster'.

The Lord appointed 72 of his disciples and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place and home where he was about to go with his message of peace, salvation and healing on what was actually an urgent mission to proclaim that, 'The kingdom of God has come near'. And each successive generation of the church gets to read and meditate and then receive Christ's command and is appointed to go out and do the same with the blessing of God's peace upon us... to which we all can seem to have good excuses in our own hearts and minds- to not do because we think, I'm too old. Or we say, You can't teach an old dog new tricks! ... Or can you?

A few months ago I heard the story of an 80 year old Abbott who had been a monk, and quite a persuasive evangelist and tireless missionary who throughout his life had established a number of new abbeys and monasteries for the Catholic Church in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and France ministering widely in answer to Christ's command to 'Go'. You would think that at the age of 80 that the old dog wouldn't have to learn, let alone do any more new tricks like embarking on a journey for instance out into the complete unknown, just as it would have been for at least 60 of the 72 disciples that Jesus sent out with his message of peace that the kingdom of God is near.

This monk, this Irish Abbott, has come to be known in Church and history as St Brendan the Navigator. While many regard St Patrick as the best-known saint of Ireland, for centuries that place of honour was held by St. Brendan the Navigator. And here's why. Born in Kerry, Ireland during the Middle Ages in the year of our Lord 484, at the age of 80, which is quite biblical when you consider that God revealed himself to Moses, appointing and commanding him to take his message to Pharaoh and introduce the Israelites to their God and lead them out of Egypt, at the very same age. But it was no burning bush that set Brendan's heart ablaze. The 80 year old Abbott of the monastery that he himself had founded, during a time of prayer and meditation, which included reading the passage of scripture from the Gospel of Luke 10:1-12 and after receiving an accompanying vision of far off unknown lands, what was his reaction to be to God's word and command to "Go, I am sending you out"? Was it to be... But I'm too old or, you

can't teach an old dog new tricks, let alone expect him to do them? Well apparently Brendan didn't know anything about old dog's but he did know what to do with the hides of animals.

You see he quickly gathered together a group of about 14 handpicked monks and promptly went and constructed a 36-foot, light, wooden-framed and ribbed boat called a curragh. This they covered with leather skins softened with butter, and launched it in the name of the Lord, to sail under the ensign (symbol, flag) of the Cross. Now in this boat they had sails and oars but no rudder or tiller because in response to Jesus' command to GO, and as Brendan didn't actually know how to get to where he was being sent, he decided to let God be God allowing, the wind and the ocean currents to be representative of the power and actions of the Holy Spirit who was going to guide and direct him and his crew to the unknown Promised Land that he had seen in his vision.

So off they go at Christ's command launching out into the mostly uncharted Atlantic Ocean in the 6th Century, according to some scholars 400 years before the Scandanavian explorer Leif Ericsson and about 1000 years before Christopher Columbus sailed this ocean.

His reputation as a Navigator rests on the account recorded a few centuries later by a monk in *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* (The Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot). A journey where St. Brendan and his crew drifted from one island to the next, "following God's stepping stones," in search of the Promised Land in Brendan's vision. Though they had no practical idea of where this island was, they nevertheless exercised great confidence in Christ who has sent them to GO find it and the people who lived there and God who would, sooner or later, reveal it to them. The particulars of the *Navigatio* give us a clear indication of where the prevailing winds and currents took him. Some nine months into the voyage, St. Brendan and his companions had clearly, by way of the island of St. Kilda, reached the Faeroe Islands, 'The Island of sheep'.

From there the winds and currents probably took them to Iceland, Greenland, New Foundland, and maybe even to the American mainland. When he returned to Ireland years later, he had many fascinating stories to tell. In the *Navigatio*, St. Brendan speaks of encountering "mountains in the sea spouting fire," floating crystal palaces, monsters with catlike heads and horns growing from their mouths, and "little furry men." Scholars see in this account the earliest descriptions of Iceland's volcanoes, icebergs, walruses, and even Eskimos or North American Indians.

But the thing is that, they did eventually arrive at a large land mass where they stayed for many months. It is unknown where they landed, but some of the

descriptions make Newfoundland, Virginia, or even Florida likely candidates. They did come back, however, with knowledge and samples of flora and fauna that were neither Irish nor European.

Many medieval cartographers included St. Brendan's island on their maps. There were other adventures and reports of islands and places that approximate the Bahamas and Bermuda, Jamaica, the Azores and the Canary Islands, but that's another story. There is some mystery that surrounds this trip to North America and sailing across and around the Atlantic but it has been proved do-able by scientists and sailors.

In 1976, explorer Tim Severin built a curragh that he christened BRENDA and in the same manner as Brendan travelled through the North Atlantic to the Faroe Islands and wintered in Iceland. Severin eventually landed in Newfoundland in June 1977, proving at least the possibility of Brendan's visit to North America. Back to Brendan who continued his navigating until 577, at age 93 when he embarked on his last voyage and died shortly after his return to Ireland. He died after a long and fruitful life that continued well into his golden years all the while answering the Call of God on his life and the command of his Saviour to 'GO' without fear out into the world as an evangelist on a mission, sent to take Christ's message of peace that the kingdom of heaven is near to those out in the world who had not yet heard it.

It is said that some 900 years after Brendan and at least 400 after the publication of the Navigatio, Christopher Columbus visited Ireland to secure information about Brendan's alleged trip before setting out to find a westward route to China, relying on the legends told of St Brendan as part of his argument that it was indeed possible to travel to Asia by crossing the Atlantic. Columbus knew the Navigatio, and a map that he used when sailing from Spain in 1492 featured a large landmass in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean labeled "Saint Brendan's Island." In fact, the Spanish crown had already claimed sovereignty over it - wherever and whatever it was - and many sailors prior to Columbus had sought to find it. Although man had a taste for adventure and business God had a plan to take the Gospel thanks to Brendan's faithful missionary navigating across the Atlantic to places where they thought God would not be.

As with the example of Brendan we can ask ourselves are we good and ready, even as an older person, to go out into the world, sent by Jesus at his command out into his harvest field as his workers, not necessarily to the ends of the earth in a little boat, but into the ordinary places of our everyday lives. Now, to help us each consider what our role in being sent out with Christ's Message of Peace that the kingdom of heaven is near, let us listen to this modern day perspective on Luke 10: 1-12 by Adrian Taylor.

Now seventy remained there and were ready to follow their teacher. But instead of telling them to follow his lead, the Lord dispersed them in every direction with his own hand of blessing. Jesus paired them like pickers in a vast and ripe vineyard. All those gathered could tell this was the beginning of something radically new, something totally beyond them, reaching far outside their dreams and expectations. God was doing something different here — this was a world-shaping moment as well as a faith-forming mission. Jesus' presence assured them how mystically

God-sized yet how commonly simple this adventure was going to be. Indeed there was no place Jesus was sending them that he would not go, and no border he was asking them to cross that he was not planning to cross himself, and no social boundary he was asking them to step into that he would not step into when the time was right.

He said to them plainly, "Yes! The orchards of every earthly people are ready too — laden with fruit. There's plenty of work for you in my Father's vineyard. Join with me in asking the Father for more willing hands to help with this sacred task. He instructed them further, "Go where I am sending you; go to the places where you never thought God could be, to the very edges of society — there you will find God's children too. You are innocent, fragile and vulnerable to every threat and danger, yet I am saying 'Go!' You will not need anything that you don't already possess - the way is prepared for you. Go and do not delay."

"When you reach the ordinary places I will soon be going, humbly and confidently present your primary gift — the peace of God's hand, saving and sovereign. It will be obvious to you if they accept my peace.

If they recognize it, rejoice, but if they do not see God's open invitation leave it at their door. Stay in the home of those that welcome you, whether it is plain or foreign, it is a sacred place. Enjoy company at their table, share their cup and eat from the same loaf of bread. Whatever is served to you accept it as though receiving it from me, the Lord of the Harvest.

Be humble and honour that house by staying within it and not moving to another you might think more suitable. For those whom you once thought excluded from God's promised deliverance are actually God's children too, in need of release. "When you reach a town share the welcome of God openly with the people there. You will eat what is provided and you will heal those who are sick and urge them, saying, 'God's kingdom with ever-growing borders has reached you. Can you see it?' But when you come to a town and are turned away, return to the market square and let those people know, 'Although, you have not listened to our message and cannot see our Lord's hope extended to you - we hold nothing

against you. Yet there is but one singular unrivalled matter that we will leave with you: God's kingdom with ever-growing borders is rising like the sun against the shadows. Look!

You will not see it hiding in the darkness!' Truth be told, Sodom in all its arrogance would have been more receptive than that town.'

So this was Adrian Taylor's perspective on Luke 10 and now from your perspective what might God be saying to you today about taking his message of peace out into the world? To help us engage the reality of this challenge in our own lives I finish with a prayer that is ascribed to Saint Brendan the Navigator before setting sail across the Atlantic to help us...

SAINT BRENDAN'S PRAYER:

Shall I abandon, O King of mysteries, the soft comforts of home?
Shall I turn my back on my native land, and turn my face towards the sea?
Shall I put myself wholly at your mercy, without silver, without a horse, without fame, without honor? Shall I throw myself wholly upon You, without sword and shield, without food and drink, without a bed to lie on?
Shall I say farewell to my beautiful land, placing myself under Your yoke?
Shall I pour out my heart to You, confessing my manifold sins and begging forgiveness, tears streaming down my cheeks?
Shall I leave the prints of my knees on the sandy beach, a record of my final prayer in my native land?
Shall I then suffer every kind of wound that the sea can inflict?
Shall I take my tiny boat across the wide sparkling ocean?
O King of the Glorious Heaven, shall I go of my own choice upon the sea?
O Christ, will You help me on the wild waves?

[Amen]