

“Vox Wellingtonia”

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Acts 16.1-12

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Vox Macedonia

Paul had a plan. He'd mapped the route, through various provinces of the Roman Empire. He' re-visit cities where he had started Christ-communities. Then with his companions they'd press westward, to the urban areas along the Aegean coast. They'd proclaim among the nations the Gospel announcement about Jesus the Messiah,

Good plan! God's plan was different.

They'd gotten so far, and expected to continue westward along a major road.¹ But the Holy Spirit stopped them.

So they went north. The Black Sea had many important cities too. Bringing the Good News there made so much sense. But Jesus' Spirit soon blocked that way also.

So they turned east. They'd already walked more than 1,000 kilometres. Many more lay ahead . . . none of which they'd planned.

Days later, it happened. They were in Troas. The Lord gave Paul a vision. A man, begging: “*Come over to Macedonia and help us.*”

Macedonia. That was across the Thracian Sea. They'd never considered going there!

They went. They had heard the *Vox Macedonia*, the cry of the Macedonians. The Lord was sending them.²

We gathered this morning with music from the Macedonian Orthodox Church. That man cried out to Paul, and twenty centuries later the praises of Macedonian Christians cry out in worship.

II

Vox Hibernia

Patricius had no plan. He was just a teenager, after all. It was 5th century Britain. We can't be sure where young Pat grew up. It was likely around the Cumbrian mountains, close to the sea. So it was that raiders easily came ashore, with destruction and death, snatched Pat up, and bound him back with them, into slavery in Hibernia.

¹ The *Via Sebaste* connected communities in the area. www.anatolianroads.org/via-sebaste

² The basic idea and much of the material I use comes from Ross A. Lockhart, *Beyond Snakes and Shamrocks: St. Patrick's Missional Leadership Lessons for Today* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), Kindle Edition.

For six years he was a slave. And, God met him there.

He'd been raised in a Christian family, but absorbed little of his parents' allegiance to Jesus. But now alone, cut off, forced to tend sheep in strange lands, "*the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith,*" he said.

*Even though it came about late, I recognised my failings. So I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he looked down on my lowliness and had mercy on my youthful ignorance. He guarded me before I knew him, and before I came to wisdom and could distinguish between good and evil. He protected me and consoled me as a father does for his son.*³

Through long days and nights, Pat learned to pray, and grew in love for God.⁴

Eventually he ran away and found his way home. He'd escaped, but not from Hibernia.

A few years later . . .

*. . . I saw, in a vision in the night, a man whose name was Victoricus coming as it were from [Hibernia] with so many letters they could not be counted. He gave me one of these, and I read the beginning of the letter, the voice of the [Hibernian] people. . . . They called out . . . "We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us."*⁵

So he went. First, to Europe for study. Then back across the sea. He'd heard the *Vox Hibernia*, the call of Ireland. Patricius . . . Patrick would share Jesus' Gospel throughout the land where he'd been captive, and given freedom in Christ.

Before we continue, let's listen to a song. It's probably not by Patrick, but it expresses well the truth of God, who protected him, and defends us, like a piece of armour. Here's *St. Patrick's Breastplate*.⁶

III

Plans?

³ Patrick, *Confessio* and *Epistola*. Translated by Pádraig McCarthy, 2003. © 2011 Royal Irish Academy. CC BY-NC 3.0. https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#, paragraph 2.

⁴ He later wrote, "After I arrived in Ireland, I tended sheep every day, and I prayed frequently during the day. More and more the love of God increased, and my sense of awe before God. Faith grew, and my spirit was moved, so that in one day I would pray up to one hundred times, and at night perhaps the same. I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain. I never felt the worse for it, and I never felt lazy – as I realise now, the spirit was burning in me at that time." *Confessio*, paragraph 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, paragraph 23.

⁶ We listened to a shortened version, sung by the choir of Down Cathedral, Kirkpatrick, Ireland. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH4ToVxtngA>

Back to our stories. Paul and his companions had plans. They knew where they were going and why. Patrick expected his life would unfold normally.

But things happened.

Sound familiar?

We had plans. I expected "normal." A pandemic? Not part of that. "Road closed" signs are blocking paths we thought we were following.

What's God up to?

Paul and his friends realized that it was God blocking their way. Maybe it was a strong inner impression formed through prayer? Maybe it was some external barrier, like illness, opposition, or another unforeseen circumstance? Whatever, they saw God's hand in it.

But what about Patrick? Was God behind his capture and enslavement? I don't know what he thought.

Has God brought this pandemic? I would not say that. I am confident, nonetheless, that none of this is surprising to God. God is shaping our way so we can walk faithfully in the midst of this.

IV

Vox Wellingtonia

Paul knew to listen for God. Patrick learned to listen for God. And then, they heard voices.

Paul heard the *Vox Macedonia*, the cry of the Macedonians: "Come over and help us." Patrick heard the *Vox Hibernia*, the cry of the Irish: "Come and walk among us."

Are you hearing?

What is the *Vox Wellingtonia*? What is the cry of our neighbours and neighbourhoods in our area, Wellington County?

Jesus charges us to act with love for our neighbour. So we need to listen to our neighbours. What are their cries?

*What is the cry of our neighbourhoods?
What are the needs? Where is the hurting?*

What cries are you hearing?