



borders and belonging

resources for corrymeela sunday

saint patrick's day, march seventeenth, twenty nineteen

We are at a particular time in Irish-British relations.

Corrymeela was born in the imagination of Ray Davey, a clergyman who had volunteered with the YMCA in World War II. Captured, he was taken from one prisoner of war camp to another, eventually ending up outside Dresden. His release coincided with the bombing of Dresden. This freedom came at the expense of the lives of many, and he returned to Belfast a changed man. Ireland had only been partitioned in 1921, and this fresh border had always been an uneasy one: bringing belonging for some, and burden for others. Ray Davey saw that what was needed was long-term solutions that fostered careful, cordial and candid relationships between British and Irish people who thought differently about identity, borders, community and religion.

Corrymeela — the movement, the residential centre, the Christian community — was born out of this desire for a witness to peace. We host 10,000 people per year at our residential centre, holding trainings, retreats, engagements and programmes that *Transform Division through Human Encounter*. We are grateful to those generous people — from all across Britain and Ireland — who have contributed to our practice, our support and our learning. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Corrymeela was hugely reliant on the generosity of the “Friends” network, a body of people mostly concentrated in England, who continually raised money to support people needing to find a place of safety where they could deepen their practice of peace — for themselves and with each other.

In the spirit of friendship, we know we can speak truthfully. Irish and British relations have deteriorated — in government, print and conversation — in the last few years. People of good will voted in different ways regarding Brexit. What concerns us is the way in which the hard-won peace has been weakened by the deterioration of public British-Irish relations. The territory of Northern Ireland is a testament to 700 years of British-Irish engagement. Here we realise that the past is present to us — the achievements of the past twenty years have made a more peaceful present possible.

To mark Corrymeela Sunday 2019, we have compiled a resource to remind us of who we can be. There are quotations from Ireland’s Patron Saint: Patrick, from Britain. There is the Governments’ Declaration of Support for the Good Friday Agreement. There are quotations from leaders beloved in Ireland and Britain. There are reflections on the readings for March 17th from the Revised Common Lectionary, and there are prayers. The biblical texts for March 17th are filled with the reality and challenges of division, enmity and vision. True peace is built upon true tellings. These texts tell us today, and our prayer is that we can act in a way that lives into the peace that calls us.

Friendship that is established between jurisdictions that have long and painful history is not saccharine; it withstands serious tests. It is this strength of friendship — the capacity to speak candidly and carefully to one another — that we rely on. Our prayer is that we can draw on it.

This resource comes with the love and dedication of the Corrymeela Community for the peoples of these noble islands — Britain and Ireland — to bear witness to the extraordinary achievements of the last decades in bringing centuries of enmity to a commitment for each other’s common good.

We stand together in heart, in Croí, knowing that God is found in the heart, and that the heart is the place of courage. May we be courageous, may we learn, may we love.

Pádraig Ó Tuama, Leader of the Corrymeela Community.

From the Confession of Patrick:

Stammering tongues will quickly learn to speak peace

1

My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers. I am looked down upon by many. My father was Calpornius. He was a deacon; his father was Potitus, a priest, who lived at Bannavem Taburniae. His home was near there, and that is where I was taken prisoner. I was about sixteen at the time. At that time, I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity in Ireland, along with thousands of others.

2

...God .. guarded me before I knew him, and before I came to wisdom and could distinguish between good and evil.

3

That is why I cannot be silent – nor would it be good to do so – about such great blessings and such a gift that the Lord so kindly bestowed in the land of my captivity.

6

Although I am imperfect in many ways, I want my brothers and relations to know what I'm really like, so that they can see what it is that inspires my life.

9

This is why I have long thought to write, but up to now I have hesitated, because I feared what people would say. This is because I did not learn as others did, who drank in equally well both the law and the sacred writings, and never had to change their way of speaking since childhood, but always grew better and better at it. For me, however, my speech and words have been translated into a foreign language, as it can be easily seen from my writings the standard of the instruction and learning I have had.

10

I was taken prisoner as a youth, particularly young in the matter of being able to speak, and before I knew what I should seek and what I should avoid. That is why, today, I blush and am afraid to expose my lack of experience, because I can't express myself with the brief words I would like in my heart and soul.

11

If I seem to some to be too forward, with my lack of knowledge and my even slower tongue, still it is written: 'Stammering tongues will quickly learn to speak peace.'

12

So I am first of all a simple country person, a refugee, and unlearned. I do not know how to provide for the future. But this I know for certain, that before I was brought low, I was like a stone lying deep in the mud.

16

After I arrived in Ireland, I tended sheep every day, and I prayed frequently during the day. I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain.

17

It was there one night in my sleep that I heard a voice saying to me: “You have fasted well. Very soon you will return to your native country.” Again after a short while, I heard a someone saying to me: “Look – your ship is ready.”

23

A few years later I was again with my parents in Britain. They welcomed me as a son, and they pleaded with me that, after all the many tribulations I had undergone, I should never leave them again. It was while I was there that I saw, in a vision in the night, a man whose name was Victoricus coming as it were from Ireland 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 Irish people. While I was reading out the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard at that moment the voice of those who were beside the wood of Voclut, near the western sea. They called out as it were with one voice: “We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us.” This touched my heart deeply, and I could not read any further; I woke up then. Thanks be to God, after many years the Lord granted them what they were calling for.

34

So I'll never stop giving thanks to my God... This is how I come to praise and magnify your name among the nations all the time, wherever I am, not only in good times but in the difficult times too. Whatever comes about for me, good or bad, I ought to accept them equally and give thanks to God. He has shown me that I can put my faith in him without wavering and without end. However ignorant I am, he has heard me, so that in these late days I can dare to undertake such a holy and wonderful work.

The full text of Patrick's Confession is available — in Latin, Irish, English, Italian, Portuguese and German — on the website www.confessio.ie This translation comes from that resource, and was translated from Latin by Pádraig McCarthy. The text is licensed under a Creative Commons Licence, funded by the Irish government, the EU, and the Higher Education Authority.

The Declaration of Support — on behalf of the British and Irish Governments — to the Good Friday Agreement.

1. We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations, believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning.
2. The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.
3. We are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between these islands.
4. We reaffirm our total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues, and our opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose, whether in regard to this agreement or otherwise.
5. We acknowledge the substantial differences between our continuing, and equally legitimate, political aspirations. However, we will endeavour to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements. We pledge that we will, in good faith, work to ensure the success of each and every one of the arrangements to be established under this agreement. It is accepted that all of the institutional and constitutional arrangements - an Assembly in Northern Ireland, a North/South Ministerial Council, implementation bodies, a British-Irish Council and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and any amendments to British Acts of Parliament and the Constitution of Ireland - are interlocking and interdependent and that in particular the functioning of the Assembly and the North/South Council are so closely inter-related that the success of each depends on that of the other.
6. Accordingly, in a spirit of concord, we strongly commend this agreement to the people, North and South, for their approval.

The Belfast Agreement — also known as the Good Friday Agreement — is a peace treaty signed by the Irish and British governments, establishing their commitment to peace in Northern Ireland and between Britain and Ireland, and signalling support for the perpetuation of the peace dividends. The Agreement established British-Irish bodies to support the Peace, and recognises that Peace in the North depends also on peaceful and cordial relations between the British and Irish governments and jurisdictions as a whole. Importantly, the Agreement enshrined into law significant emendations to both the Irish Constitution and British Acts of Parliament, notably that the future jurisdictional belonging of Northern Ireland will be for the people of Ireland to decide. The Agreement established the Stormont Assembly, with a coalition model for shared and safe community representation in devolved matters.

Full text of the Agreement is hosted on the websites of both governments:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement>

https://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/Pdf%20files/NIPeaceAgreement.pdf

“A Uachtaráin agus a chairde... it is... true that no one who looked to the future over the past centuries could have imagined the strength of the bonds that are now in place between the governments and the people of our two nations, the spirit of partnership that we now enjoy, and the lasting rapport between us...No one here this evening could doubt that heartfelt desire of our two nations.”



*Civic address by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II
at a State Dinner in Dublin Castle, May 18th, 2011.*



“the momentous Good Friday Agreement of 1998. That achievement was founded on the cornerstones of equality, justice and democratic partnership, and was a key milestone on the road to today’s warm, deep and enduring Irish-British friendship.”

*Address by President Michael D. Higgins
to the Houses of Parliament,
Westminster, London, 8th April 2014.*



The First Reading: Genesis 15:1-12; 17-18.

Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” ² But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” ⁴ But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” ⁵ He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Gen 15:7 Then he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.” ⁸ But he said, “O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” ⁹ He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

Gen 15:12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

Gen 15:17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

A well-known midrashic story concerns his deliverance from a fiery furnace. Abram's father gives Abram over to an enemy saying 'Let us worship fire!' Abram's negotiation skills are honed. He suggests: 'Should we not worship water? or cloud? or wind?, or the human?' However, despite his protests, Abram is indeed put into the fire, but he survives it. Shortly thereafter, he leaves the household of his father, and the homeland of his people — seeking a new place of belonging.

In this text we hear of Abram's primal desire for a future. To be without heirs was considered a slight on a person. We see Abram — a pilgrim, who had fled the wrath of Terah, his father, a man obsessed by fire — and we hear his deep yearning for belonging.

Belonging is a desire at the heart of us all: to belong to ourselves, to belong to others, to belong to a place, to belong to a God. Abram speaks for many, especially many who have had to flee, when he expresses the desire to belong with such yearning and desire.

And we see that Abram has brought his own trauma with him. Even when he sleeps, “a deep and terrifying darkness” descends upon him, and a firepot and torch haunt his dreams. It is as if the remnants of what he's survived have come with him, and in his prayer, he is faced with the thing that terrifies him most. He must face his devastation in order to face into his destiny. This is not easy for Abram, but it is the way of wisdom and maturity for him.

Hearing of the trauma he carries, the things he's fled, and the yearning for belonging he has — now located in a strange land, with strange gods and landscapes all around him — we are minded of all human stories of exile and flight.

The Psalm: Psalm 27

Ps 27:0 *Of David.*

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

Ps 27:2 When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

Ps 27:3 Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

Ps 27:4 One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.

Ps 27:5 For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

Ps 27:6 Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

Ps 27:7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
⁸ “Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”
Your face, LORD, do I seek.
⁹ Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
¹⁰ If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.

Ps 27:11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path

- because of my enemies.
- 12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.
- Ps 27:13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
- 14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!

So much of the biblical witness is written from within a context of conflict. In this poem we hear the Psalmist — in the midst of fear — speak of evildoers, adversaries, foes, armies encamped against them, war, and enemies.

Some people live lives where they are indeed surrounded by those who actively seek their downfall.

However, we must be wise when interpreting the text. For some, the belief that there are enemies around them means they actively seek out enemies, neglecting the question of self-analysis: am I dependent on having enemies in order to justify the way I live my life?

As we explore European identities in 2019, we may well ask the question. For some, it is people arriving on boats who are the enemies, as if Europeans never set sail on boats for other countries and became enemies of peoples across other continents.

Such enemy-speak calls us to examine how it is we set up our sense of belonging. Do we feel somehow justified, entitled, or saved by being in fighting frames of mind?

Can we truly turn — like the psalmist is struggling to do — to a place of shelter? The place of shelter in this psalm is a place where beauty, not enmity, fills the gaze. You see beyond whatever armies might seem to arise on the horizon, to a larger horizon. The psalmist's prayer is deeply embedded in a context of aggression, yet the prayer itself holds the everlasting wisdom: those who are addicted to perpetuating systems of violence need to find a way to break out of their systems of violence. The psalm knows some uncomfortable truths: your closest people may turn against you if you turn against narratives of enmity. However, this is the shelter of God's wings: to move from dynamics where we make enemies of others into a dynamic where we can find a new way of belonging in the embrace of God.

The Second Reading: Philippians 3:17-4:1

Phil 3:17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Phil 4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Once again, we hear the writer addressing those who are in conflict.

And, without being trite, those who are in conflict are urged not to be part of the escalation of conflict.

There are both theological and psychological analyses that are very helpful for us as we look at the way these texts are addressed. In recent studies, readers of biblical texts were asked “Who do you identify with when reading a text?” Most people readily — and easily — identified with being those who were facing hardship.

However, few people identified with those who were causing hardship.

And this is a call for us today. Here we see Paul, writing to the Philippians, urging them to raise their sights to something bigger than the hardships that undo them. And we may find ourselves imagining that we, like Paul’s audience, must, too, lift up our eyes.

It is entirely possible that we are part of the peoples bringing hardship to other populations. To turn the biblical text around — to imagine ourselves, not only as practitioners of virtue, but as the ones who are piling hardship on the already downtrodden — this is part of the invitation of scripture: to see ourselves as the burdened and the burdening.

Not everybody needs to do this: there are some who are downtrodden, and it is inappropriate to expect them to analyse themselves when they are barely surviving others’ burdens upon them.

However there are many of us who are not downtrodden, whose lives benefit us, whose ease and futures are established and expected to be favourable — not luxurious, but favourable. In this context, our comfort needs to be disturbed by our reading of the text: are we the ones who are involved in the distress of others? Are there ways in which we are causing others to feel exiled from their own places of belonging? And if so, how can we lift our eyes from our self serving needs and address our mutual, shared citizenship of a belonging that puts all as equal citizens?

The Gospel: Luke 13:31-35

Luke 13:31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³² He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³ Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵ See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

The gospels are so often painted against the backdrop of a discordant relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and the Pharisees. Much wrong has been done to the Jewish community on the basis of this didactic telling. It is true that some of Jesus’ harshest words are directed towards those who hold religious power, or, at least, religious influence.

However it is not true that the relationship is narrated in an entirely negative light. It’s striking to notice that Matthew’s gospel portrays Jesus as one of the Pharisees: he’s so well versed in their style of argumentation that he is seen as a reformer among them, rather than a critic from outside.

In John’s gospel, too, we encounter this extraordinary character of Nicodemus, so complex, compelled and compelling in his continual return to the story.

Here in Luke’s gospel we see some Pharisees coming to warn Jesus that Herod wishes to kill him.

In times of difficulty — occupation, war — unusual things happen to relationships. Sometimes unexpected alliances are established. Other times sibling is split from sibling. And this kind of division can be exhilarating for the human condition.

In this engagement from today’s lectionary sequence, we see a gesture of care and protection coming to Jesus from the Pharisees, and we see that Jesus is spectacularly unconcerned with letting threat — threat of Herod, threat of violence — interrupt what he knows his integrity calls him to. One can imagine that friends of Jesus, and his family, would have found this to be infuriating. Looking at it from the vantage point of history, we can admire someone who was deliberately sidestepping the melodrama of other people’s agendas, instead speaking the language of care, gathering, blessing and power, in the face of impending doom.

This is a portrayal of Our Lord of Division: at once with his eyes set on a horizon that lifts him and others above the divisions that undo us, and at the same time, utterly embodied and incarnated in the circumstances of the world. Let us pray for all of us — on different sides of our debates about borders and belonging — to have such a capacity: to gather, to speak of care, to speak of belonging, to bless.

Collect for the day:

God of all islands,
large, little, here, there.
While some crossings
between our islands of Britain and Ireland
have been tumultuous
other crossings have changed us
— for the good, forever.
May our crossings towards and with each other
be guided and transformed by generosity, and goodness,
and lamentation and commitment.
May they be guided by you,
who calmed seas
that were filled with chaos.
Because even when things are rough
it is you
who calls us to quiet
and learning.
Amen.

Intercessions:

Today we pray for community. Praying to the Community of the Trinity, we stand in mystery and desire for connection. In many ways we experience this mystery with others: friendships, family, in moments of silence, in moments of work. We also know the pain of division, of separation; we know the appeal of enmity and the temptation to think that past injuries are behind us simply because they don't affect us. May we all be drawn into the mystery of community, that truthful, honest, demanding, forgiving, risky space that exists between us. This is the space where we encounter each other. This is the space where we encounter God, and it is to God we pray.

God of Encounter, hear our Prayer.

Today we pray for peace. Many know the ravages of war. We pray for all those negotiating peace: whether in Parliamentary houses or in places of refuge. May they find the wisdom and generosity to shape words that will support lasting peace. For one of the names of God is Shalom, and it is to God we pray.

God of Encounter, hear our Prayer.

God of land and sea. We remember that it was Patrick, a refugee, a young man trafficked by those whose interests were violent, who brought a message of the gospel to Ireland. We thank you for the love he had for a people not his own. We bless Britain — his homeland — and Ireland — his adopted country. He is rightfully the Patron Saint of Ireland, and today we also name him the Patron Saint of Refugees and Trafficked peoples. You are with all people, especially those who have been ignored, forgotten or mistreated, and it is for their liberation that we pray to you.

God of Encounter, hear our Prayer.

God of welcomes, we are grateful for places of welcome. We thank you for the welcome offered by Corrymeela to thousands of people every year. We pray for the ongoing support and success of the work — both at the Corrymeela centre and in the community. We bless and pray for all initiatives of good will and community relations healing British-Irish relations, in both Ireland and Britain. In our shared history we see that you have given us stories that might heal us, and it is to you we pray.

God of Encounter, hear our Prayer.

God of wisdom, we pray for our leaders. We give thanks for those who take the risk of public office. May they listen, learn and lead in the ways that lead to peace; in the ways that lead to justice; in the ways that lead to safety. We hold them before you, and it is to you we pray.

God of Encounter, hear our Prayer.

God of healing. We hold in our hearts today all who are bereaved. When we are bereaved our hearts are changed, and you are the one who knows every change of every heart. You know our hearts better than we do, and it is to you we pray.

God of Encounter, hear our Prayer.



The Corrymeela Community was established in 1965. As a dispersed Christian community of 170 members, Corrymeela has a residential centre and offices from which the work of *Transforming Division through Human Encounter* takes place. With 30 staff, and over 80,000 volunteers per annum, Corrymeela collaborates with faith groups, community groups, educational groups (formal and informal education), political and community groups to contribute to the healing of pain and the creation of a society where we live and work and learn well together.

Corrymeela has been supported, for decades, by the dedication of an international group of Friends. Friends of Corrymeela give £5-£10 per month, receive two magazines per year, and support work of reconciliation that would otherwise be impossible. To learn more, visit www.corrymeela.org/donate



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