



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Dove of the Church

Rev. Louise Rogers

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Jesus Stills a Storm

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” ³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” ³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” ⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

In the Bridge, the contemporary worship service at 9:40, we are preaching a series titled For All the Saints, where we are looking at the lives of those we call the Saints. Each one of the preachers at Westminster was asked to select a Saint who has influenced his/her life. Generally as Presbyterians we don't speak much about the Saints in the formal sense of the word. Yet here are men and women who have walked extraordinary lives of devotion to God and by examining their ways and looking at their days our hope is that we will all be inspired in our own faith walk. Today I bring to you Saint Columba. I learned about his story when I went to Scotland with a group of Presbyterians from the south hills of Pittsburgh on a pilgrimage in 2014. We traveled all around Scotland visiting kirks, as they are called, and spiritual places and I discovered the rich story of Columba which has given me such encouragement in my faith that I want to share this with you today.

First a bit of background: Saint Columba was known as the Apostle to the Scots, the people of Scotland. His name means, Dove, so he is known as the Dove of the Church. As a tall, strapping young man with a booming voice and red hair he evangelized –preached the gospel and won hearts for Christ throughout Scotland. He performed miracles and established monasteries that have lasted 1400 years. Clearly his godly work has entitled him to become a Saint in the church, and his image is worthy to be etched in the stain glass windows in the cathedrals and kirks in Scotland.

Yet, his work for the church and the kingdom of God is not what ultimately inspired me about this man. What caught my interest was his personal story; his early years

and the personal storms and mistakes that brought him to a deeper place in his faith which formed his later ministry. So now I will share the rest of his story. Columba was actually born in Ireland around 543 AD. As a priest he lived in the monastery where his assignment was to copy manuscripts. He loved books. Keep in mind that most people of that day could not read, and books were a prized possession. At one time, a Psalter, an elaborate book of the Psalms, came to the monastery. Columba decided he would make a copy for himself. When the owner found out about the copy he was furious. The case wound up in the civil courts where the ruling stands as one of the first copyright cases. The verdict handed down read like this: As the calf goes with the cow so the copy goes with the original. Columba lost the court case and having a bad temper, Columba protested. His family backed him against his opponent. Soon words turned into weapons and in the ensuing fight men died on both sides.

After this crisis had passed, Columba was held accountable for causing all of this trouble. Columba was banished from Ireland. He had to leave immediately with a few companions. When they left, they were to go out to a place, so when they landed, they were to go to the highest point and when they looked back, and when they could no longer see Ireland, there they could settle - never to return. They set out for places unknown to fulfill their sentence. They left their homeland, their family, their church and their comforts and set out for a faraway destination.

As I stood in Columba's Bay on the Island of Iona in Scotland, I pictured Columba and those men getting out of their boat at that deserted cove on the island in Scotland. Not much has changed since they arrived in 563AD, only

rocks along the shore line, sea grass and a few birds overhead. The men emerged from their stormy days with meager supplies and broken hearts from all that had happened. They must have wondered how this happened. How did we get to this place? How will we move forward and where was God in the midst of this storm?

Storms of life don't just blow up in the lives of the ancient Saints. We know all too well that they come in our lives too. We don't have to be banished to another country to know the feeling of starting over; a diagnosis that changes everything, children going off to school, downsizing and moving to a new home, each of us comes to our own crossroads where we cannot go back to our former life. There are times when we too must take bold steps forward. Events swirl around us, and we get pulled into the middle and wonder how did we get here? How are we going to manage?

The disciples of Jesus got caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee where the wind blew so hard they were terrified. The Sea of Galilee is known for looking calm one moment and then the winds change suddenly, and you can get caught in a great storm unexpectedly. The men in the boat were seasoned fishermen and yet they were afraid for their lives. Would they sink on the sea? Thinking they were going to die they finally woke up Jesus who was sleeping through the storm. The Lord wasted no time in unleashing the power of the almighty, calming the wind and rain in a dramatic display of God's power. Jesus calmed both the storm that was raging all around and the storm within the disciples.

God stands with us in the storms of our life too. God hears our urgent prayers even as we then watch and wait. Sometimes the breath of heaven blows and the clouds scatter. We see the grumpy boss transferred, the oppressive burden is lifted, and we receive the answer we hoped for from the doctor. The sun shines through. Yes, sometimes God does calm the storm. But other times, maybe most of the time, God's choice is to calm us in the midst of the storm. Rather than quiet the tempest, God stills our hearts. God removes the fear. Rather than grant deliverance, God brings companions for the journey, sends us strength and finally we find acceptance, trusting in the ways of the Lord.

Our lives are light years from Columba and his clan. But as I stood looking at the dark waters of the north Atlantic I found peace. God's redemptive work was already at work in them even as they got out of their boat and walked on shore. From misplaced loyalties, selfish concerns and stubborn hearts, God moved them to start again through forgiveness and mercy despite their dark past. Columba's companions went on to establish a monastery on that island of Iona that became a center of spirituality and trade for hundreds of years and impacted lives in Western Europe for centuries.

In the 23rd Psalm, David says, "He leads me beside the still waters, he restores my soul." The still waters can be the still lake on a pristine day with the sun shining. Or the waters can be a pool of stagnant waters where there is danger. The good Shepherd is beside us, leading us and guiding us in either case. As the storms arrive in our lives like the Saint, we can approach the Lord in prayer and listen to his voice for us; trusting that he will restore our soul too.

Courage to move forward, redemption and finally peace in the reassurance of the presence of the Lord with us is the legacy that I found in the life of Columba. The Saints are really not any different than us; they have days of walking close to God and days of heart break but always in the presence of the Lord. And may it be for us as well. Amen.



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