

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Intro

Although it is often hard to remember, it is said that from difficult things – good can come.

If you think about it, the irritation of a grain of sand inside an oyster's mouth can result in a beautiful pearl.

The constant grinding and erosion of the Colorado River becomes the magnificent Grand Canyon.

Throughout life there are times when we go through the darkest time, only to have it resolve with glorious results.

Truly, from difficult times – good can come.

## I. Columba

A. This was certainly true for St. Columba.

1. Columba was born around 521 – 1,500 years ago.
2. He was educated at the great monastic schools of Ireland.
3. He was ordained a Deacon and a Priest and at the age of 25, began a 15 year career travelling all over Ireland preaching and setting up monasteries.
4. It is said that by the age of 41- he had established 41 monasteries.

B. But Columba also loved books – and copying them by hand – which was the only way to make a copy of a book – and it was because of a book that his life took a turn.

1. I won't go into the details this time, but long-story-made-short – Columba copied a book that wasn't his to copy and when he lost the book, a dispute broke out that ended up in a battle which cost 3,000 men their lives.

2. As a result of that dispute, and the battle he had caused, Columba was banished from Ireland, and told never to return.

3. For Columba this was the most devastating thing that could happen to him.

4. He was sent into exile – he had to leave Ireland – the land he loved – and could never come back.

5. So, Columba set out to win the same number of souls for Christ as had died in the battle.

6. And so in 563, at the age of 42, Columba and 12 companions set out from Ireland in a small *coracle* to go to a new land.

7. The story goes that he sailed until he couldn't see Ireland any more – and eventually they landed on the Island of Iona, where they began their new life.

C. There they built their monastery consisting of a Chapel and Dining Hall and their small beehive-shaped huts.

1. Life for the monks of Iona was very much like they had known it in Ireland: they tilled the soil, fished, copied manuscripts by hand, and followed the routine of prayer of the Monastic Hours.

2. The Monks of Iona practiced a simple life, with a diet of mostly barley or oat cakes and water, but along with their prayer life they practiced great hospitality too – and used this HOSPITALITY as a **missionary tool**, welcoming many visitors to Iona.

3. **Prayer** and **Hospitality**: two keys to Columba's success – remember these, we will come back to them a little later.

4. After about two years, Columba began making journeys to the other islands and the mainland and began telling people about the love of God.

5. As he went, he followed his old practice of preaching and setting up monasteries – eventually, he even converted the local King.

6. Columba is credited with bringing Christianity to the Picts and Scots of Scotland – before he died in 597 at the ripe old age of 77, he had saved far more than the 3,000 souls he had lost.

7. He and his successors are credited with bringing what we call Celtic or Columban Christianity (though they would have never called it that) to the northern part of England and across to the continent of Europe as well.

8. So truly, out of the devastation of Columba's exile from the land he loved came the great blessing of Iona and the spread of Celtic Christianity by Columba and his followers.

## II. In COVID Times

A. We have been through some pretty bleak times ourselves recently – although perhaps not as dark as Columba's.

1. Over this past year plus we have lost a lot of people and things we've held dear.

2. We were bereft of the ability to be together in the social things we love – and especially the opportunity to worship together in church – something we've only recovered today.

3. We lost membership and the opportunity to reach out and welcome new people into our midst – we took a hit to our finances as people were not able to make the same pledge they used to.

4. We had to forgo ministry opportunities like the Fiesta and CROP Walk – and education opportunities like the Forum and Sunday School – as well as social times like the BBQ and the Celtic Christmas Faire.

5. Yes, this past year has cost us a lot – things looked pretty dark there for a while.

B. But as we said, out of difficult times good things can come.

1. We may not have been able to be IN the church, but we've still been able to bring Church to you – we learned how to record our services and put them out on-line – and you've learned you like going to church in your pajamas.

2. And while we didn't have services to invite people to – we did have all sorts of folks who joined us on-line – both old friends and new.

3. And we have learned how to use ZOOM for all sorts of things – we even held the Annual Meeting by Zoom – as well as Book Club and Lent class, Vestry meetings and all.

4. You have been faithful in your giving – and with the help of a PPP loan – now forgiven – we ended the year in good shape and are plowing ahead.

5. Through it all we have been able to keep going – and make a difference in the life of those around us.

### III. Looking ahead

A. So now as we begin to look ahead, what other things might we begin to think and do?

1. What new and unthought-of things might emerge from the difficult times we have just been through?

2. How will we continue to share our worship experience with one another and people we have yet to meet?

3. In what ways can we share our faith – and deepen our relationship with God?

4. We are feeding 30 individuals and families through our two food programs – but what other ways can we reach out in service to the lost, the last and the least?

B. As we emerge from difficulties of the pandemic we essentially have to rebuild our life and ministries from the ground up.

1. Most of our programs and groups haven't met in over a year;  
- many of them have lost members or could use a pick-me-up.

2. Perhaps the best place to begin is the same method Columba and his monks used – PRAYER and HOSPITALITY.

3. As we continue to open our worship to more participation, we need to be a people of prayer.

4. And we must continue to offer HOSPITALITY to all those who come to us in whatever way and form – that we may seek, find, and serve Jesus in everyone we meet.

5. Following the way of Columba from so long ago, we can faithfully create new and wonderful things from the difficult times we have endured.

Let Us Pray – in the words of St. Columba – that we too may be people of Hospitality and Prayer:

*Be a bright flame before me, O God  
a guiding star above me.*

*Be a smooth path below me,  
a kindly shepherd behind me  
today, tonight, and for ever.*

*Alone with none but you, my God  
I journey on my way;  
what need I fear when you are near,  
O Lord of night and day? AMEN.*