

SERMON RECAP FROM JUNE 1, 2025

7TH SUN. OF EASTER, PSALM 119:1-8,

“Be Thou My Vision”

Sermon by Robb McCoy

“Be Thou My Vision is one of the most remarkable songs in our hymnal. Both the lyrics and the music are ancient pieces of art that were inspired by the same event in the life of Saint Patrick, but were not brought together until the early 20th century. This marriage of poem and tune has given us an incredible song that finishes our “Favorite songs of Mark” series on this, his last Sunday as our Music Director.

The tune is known as SLANE, and has its origins in a defiant act of Saint Patrick on Slane Hill in Ireland. Slane Hill is a 500 foot hill that provides breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. It has been an important site for Irish people for thousands of years. In the 400s, Saint Patrick is said to have lit the first Paschal fire on Irish soil. This fire was in defiance of the local Irish Chieftan who had forbade any fires that honored anyone but him.

The tune was written to honor St. Patrick’s faith and defiance. The site later became where Patrick ordained the first Irish Bishop. It has been the site of various churches and monasteries in the centuries since. The tune known simply as SLAIN has been used in many Irish folk songs, but in 1912 it was set to an English translation of another ancient Irish poem. Some trace the poem, which also commemorated St. Patrick’s Easter fire on Slain, to the 6th century.

When the two were brought together, it became the hymn we know as “Be Thou My Vision,” one of the most beautiful and best-loved hymns in our collection.

This joining together of words and music - both originating from the act of courage and faith of Saint Patrick - is a beautiful model for worship as a whole. Bringing together words and music, pulpit and Table, sermon and song, fellowship and prayer - this is what vital worship looks like.

This is also the power of Psalm 119. It is a song dedicated to the Law. It declares that if you put the Law at the heart of faith, then you will find salvation. And the Law is not just a list of rules. It is the Torah - the stories found in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.



These are the stories of creation, the selection of Abraham, Sarah and their family, the story of forgiveness among Joseph and his brothers, the story of Moses being called to lead the people out of slavery, the story of God providing for the people in the Wilderness. Psalm 119 reminds us to center ourselves on the *AND*, not *just* on the rules, but on the stories of God’s love, forgiveness, provision, and salvation.

A life with Christ is made beautiful with worship and service, Law and grace, lyrics and tune, faith and works. On this, Mark’s last Sunday as our Music Director, that is what I most want to celebrate - the way that Mark has made it possible to worship with Music and Preaching, with Theology and Song.

Worship, and yes all of life, is made more beautiful in the ands. “Be Thou My Vision” is a wonderful blend of two pieces of art, both inspired by the courage and faith of St. Patrick. Our words and music, our songs and preaching, our faith and works, are all centered on the story of God’s love in Torah and in Christ’s life. We make something beautiful, meaningful, and powerful, when we lean into the AND.