

Lovely Leitrim and Lough Allen

The words of the song entitled 'Lovely Leitrim', which was immortalised by country singer Larry Cunningham, remind us of one of the most beautiful places in Ireland. Lovely Leitrim, surrounded by six counties, is a tourist's paradise to which visitors return again and again. The Shannon, the longest river in Ireland, winds its way through the county and its lakes and waterways attract thousands of tourists year after year. The Shannon / Erne Waterway, reopened in 1994, provides for those interested in river cruising the opportunity to navigate their way through counties Cavan, Fermanagh and Leitrim. Anglers from many countries are drawn to Leitrim by the prospect of being able to fish on any of the forty one lakes situated within a radius of 10kms. of Carrick - on - Shannon. Many visitors choose to explore the county on foot. The North Leitrim Glens attract both the experienced and the amateur hill - walker. Glencar waterfall, immortalised by Poet W. B. Yeats, is one of the beauty spots most frequently visited by tourists. Lough Allen, famed in song and story, is the first lake on the river Shannon. This lake acts as a reservoir for the Power Station at Ard na Crusha, near Limerick.

But Lough Allen is probably best remembered for a terrible tragedy that occurred in 1831. It was customary for many of the people who lived on the northern side of the lake to make the weekly journey by boat to the market in Drumshanbo. They brought with them their farm produce. With the money made from its sale they bought the provisions needed at home. Early on the Good Friday morning of 2nd April twenty five people assembled at Corry shore, intending to make the journey to Drumshanbo. But the boat could only accommodate eighteen people, so seven had to return home. When the farm produce had been loaded into the boat the sails were unfurled and the oars manned.

As they disembarked at Drumshanbo they agreed to meet again at three o' clock to begin the journey home. This would give them enough time to cross the lake before darkness fell. Due to a number of unforeseen delays they did not manage to assemble together at the boat until seven o' clock. They loaded the vessel with the potatoes and seed they had purchased at the market. By the time all of the passengers had entered the boat it was much lower in the water than it should be. Mrs. Forde, a passenger who had made the journey several times, felt very uneasy about the situation. She expressed her concern to Paddy Travers, one of her neighbours. They decided to leave the boat and to stay overnight with friends who lived at Mount Allen. Two other passengers, men from Ballinageera, also left the boat. They decided to walk home.

The weather was favourable for the journey as the boat left Drumshanbo. However, conditions soon deteriorated. The wind began to rise and it was not very long before a gale was blowing, whipping the lake into a frenzy. Darkness had fallen at this stage, which made conditions even more difficult. The boat, which by this time had travelled about two miles, was in no condition to withstand the battering it received from the huge waves. Overloaded by its heavy cargo and unsettled by some panic - stricken passengers, the small craft had little chance of completing the journey. The boat soon capsized and its cargo and passengers were thrown into the dark swirling waters of the lake. The unfortunate passengers had no chance of survival and within a short time all were lost.

On the shore some of the local people had been watching the boat as it attempted to make the journey. But it soon disappeared in the darkness. They scanned the shore - line and much of the lake with lamps, hoping to spot some survivors. But it soon became evident that the lake had claimed the lives of all the occupants of the boat. At dawn the following morning some of the local men set out in boats, seeking to locate the bodies of those who had perished. They used grappling irons to recover the bodies, which were then placed in boats and taken to Corry. In Kilbride Cemetery the fourteen coffins were buried side by side in a mass grave. This tragedy on Lough Allen has never been forgotten, and countless visitors have sat and listened as some of the older generation retold the story.

The locals also tell of how their ancestors had the privilege of listening to Saint Patrick as he faithfully preached the Gospel in County Leitrim. Patrick saw many of the local people converted from Paganism to Christ. His message from the Scriptures was as follows:

► **We are ALL sinners**

'For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard'.¹

► **Every sinner is subject to sin's penalty**

"But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."²

► **Salvation cannot be earned through good works or religious exercises**

'God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.'³

► **God has provided ONE way of Salvation**

'Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."⁴ For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."⁵

► **Every sinner needs to repent**

'And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God'.⁶

► **Faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for Salvation**

'Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.'⁷

Saint Patrick preached the Word of God to the people of Leitrim. He told them of how Jesus had died upon the cross as a substitute for sinners, paying the penalty for the guilt of their sins. Because of what Christ had done on their behalf their sins could now be forgiven and they could be saved from Hell. Patrick encouraged them to repent of their sins and to put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friend, as we have been thinking of the drowning tragedy on Lough Allen we have been reminded of the brevity of life and the suddenness of death. What a terrible tragedy it would be if you neglected to avail of the salvation that God has provided for you.

'So what makes us think we can escape if we ignore this great salvation that was first announced by the Lord Jesus himself and then delivered to us by those who heard him speak?'⁸

What a tragedy it would be if you neglected to accept this **FREE GIFT** of Salvation -
'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ
Jesus our Lord.'⁹

Acknowledging the fact that you are a sinner,
turn to the Lord in sincere repentance.
Ask Him to forgive you and trust Him to save you.

DO NOT DELAY,
'For God says, "At just the right time, I heard you.
On the day of salvation, I helped you
Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation.'¹⁰

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Scripture References

1: Romans Ch.3 v. 23

4: John Ch.14 v. 6

7: Romans Ch. 5 v. 1

10: 2 Corinthians Ch. 6 v. 2

2: Revelation Ch. 21 v. 8

5: John Ch.3 v. 16

8: Hebrews Ch.2 v. 3

3: Ephesians Ch.2 vs. 8, 9

6: Luke Ch.13 v. 3

9: Romans Ch. 6 v. 23
