

Paying the Price for Freedom

Happy Birthday to the Land of the Free and the home of the brave. Think of how free we are. This weekend, we look to the skies for things exploding up there – and we aren't afraid that we are under attack. That wasn't the case 234 years ago. 234 years ago this nation was declared a nation. July 4, 1776, our forefathers claimed freedom from foreign rule – they declared it. But they didn't have it yet. They had to fight to win that freedom. Those signers of the declaration of independence ended up sacrificing their way of life as they knew it, their wealth, and often, their lives. And ever since then, our young men and women have been fighting to protect that freedom, sacrificing so much to do that. Because that fight requires commitment. It requires unselfish priorities. That fight for freedom demands sacrifice. You see freedom is not free. We are the land of the free because of the brave. Of course, we know that our freedom is God's gift to us, but we know that it is those brave soldiers that he has used to make us free.

Because freedom is not free. Most of you know Melodye, who's been gone for a few months, serving a year at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington DC. She's working with those soldiers who are just getting back from the war, and she is seeing firsthand the gruesome injuries they have sustained, the physical deformities they'll have to carry with them the rest of their lives. When I spoke with her this week, she told me that the biggest difference is that she's praying more than ever now because she feels for them so much, all that they have given up for us – all that their families have to go through because they were fighting for our freedom, so we don't have to be scared that our roads will explode on us as we ride home today because of the IEDs that aren't there. Freedom.

Or, I think of another of our members, who wasn't even wounded in service. He has been back from Iraq for a few years now, but still has to deal with the fact that everything has changed for him. When he went to war for us, he sacrificed more than the creature comforts he could have guessed: His relationship with his fiancé, so much time with his family and friends, his optimistic outlook on life. He said it has all changed, and all his relationships are different now because he is different.

Freedom is not free. So please, remember the sacrifices so many are making for us – people like Chris and Sandy's son that just got back from Afghanistan a few weeks ago; Ryan Kist and Jeremiah Heine who are there right now. Tracy just went there last week, leaving her husband and kids here - all to do what they can to pay for freedom. Talk about sacrifice!

In our text today, Jesus does talk about sacrifice. The sermon text and Gospel Lesson are printed for you in the bulletin. Please feel free to follow along, and as I read, notice the sacrifice Jesus performed and the sacrifice he requires.

Luke 9:51-62 ⁵¹ **As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven** (real literally that says “the time for him to be lifted up” – which could be talking about his crucifixion, when he was lifted up on the cross, or his Ascension – really it's talking about his work for us – as the time came for him to do what he came for...look at what it says), **Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.** (Literally, he “set his face toward” – he was focused and committed to doing what he had just told Peter the Christ had to do in Jerusalem – suffer and die for all people.) ⁵² **And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him;** ⁵³ **but the people there did not welcome him, because he was**

heading for Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ **When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"** (Do you know what they are talking about? Have you ever been upset when someone didn't want to hear about your savior or your church? It's easy to take it as a personal insult, right? If you don't know what I'm talking about, make sure you come out canvassing this Wednesday so you can experience both sides of that. But Jesus had to remind them what it is all about: it's not about us. It's about him.) Our text says: ⁵⁵ **But Jesus turned and rebuked them,** ⁵⁶ **and they went to another village.** ⁵⁷ **As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."** ⁵⁸ **Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."**

Do you see what Jesus is teaching here? Following Jesus requires sacrifice. It can't be about us. Even the animals have places to stay. But following Jesus sometimes means giving up the creature comforts. It means legitimate sacrifice, doing without, not getting your way. Earlier in this chapter he said that following him means denying yourself, taking up your cross and following.

Verse 59: ⁵⁹ **He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."** That sounds like a reasonable request, doesn't it? Sure the Greek has in there a word that might imply that he's going away to do this, but even so, it sounds respectable. ⁶⁰ **Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."** In other words, following Jesus requires clear priorities. If anything, as good as it might be, if anything threatens to get in the way with your relationship with Jesus – it becomes a problem. Even if it is something as good as a job or your family, or your fun, or your popularity - it becomes a problem. Following Jesus requires sacrifice and priorities. And then...

⁶¹ **Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."** Now Jesus doesn't necessarily tell him not to say goodbye, but look at what he does say: ⁶² **Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."** In other words, following Jesus requires commitment. The farmer driving the plow who is looking at everything else isn't fit for his job of plowing a straight line. It won't get done. Jesus is saying that it requires not getting distracted by the things of our world; it takes commitment to be a follower of Jesus.

Are you starting to see why they talk about being in the Lord's *army*? He expects sacrifice, priority, commitment. Does that beg a question for you? How can we say we are followers of Jesus when it's pretty clear that we don't always sacrifice everything of ourselves for our God and for others? Our priorities put things much less important than a burial ahead of our God all too often and we can't even pretend that we don't get distracted by all the stuff of this world begging for our time, all the things that our pride and our lust and our laziness want us to do. We aren't fit to be followers of Jesus. Not on our own.

So look at the beauty of this text. We failed when it came to commitment. But look at the beginning of our text: **"as the time approached for him to be lifted up, Jesus set his face like flint for Jerusalem."** He knew what would happen in Jerusalem and he was determined to do it – to replace our failed commitments on our record. Remember when he was lifted up on the cross when the mockers said "If you really are the son of God, come down and save yourself"? He could have. But he was committed to our salvation.

And even though we fail in our prioritizing, Jesus kept perfect priority. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane? Jesus prayed that he would prefer if there were some other way to accomplish this task, but then said, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

As for sacrifice... He gave up everything – all glory, honor, power...and became nothing. **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,”** Paul tells us. Jesus offered the sacrifice of a perfect life we couldn’t. And he willingly shed his blood to cover over our failures. He shed his so we don’t have to. He did far more than any soldier ever could. And so we follow him, committed to the cause, sacrificing of ourselves to get his work done, prioritizing him above all else, not just in what we say – but we act on it.

No, we don’t follow perfectly, that’s why our path contains constant trips back here, back to the foot of the cross, back to the promises of his word and sacrament for that forgiveness. And we follow - not perfectly, but perfectly forgiven. We follow in freedom.

This Fourth of July, please appreciate those soldiers who sacrificed to win and defend your freedom. Even more, worship the One who earned you eternal freedom from sin and death, guilt and fear. Now, tonight, even as you might be looking to the skies for the fireworks, we can be at peace looking to the skies for our Savior’s return because he has paid the price for our freedom and made us his.

In him,
Amen.