

"It Takes More Than Good Intentions"

AS AMERICAN AS APPLE PIE

In a few days, we will be celebrating our nation's independence. It has been 231 years since we declared our independence from His majesty King George III; 231 years of liberty, 231 years of responsible freedom. And it really isn't that long when you think about it. Compared to great civilizations that have gone before us, we are still in our infancy.

When Thomas Jefferson died Abraham Lincoln was a young man of 17. When Lincoln was assassinated, Woodrow Wilson was a boy of 8. By the time Wilson died Ronald Reagan was a boy of 12. There you have it. The lives of four men can take you all the way back to the beginning of our country, 231 years ago, and yet we have gone from a fledgling colony to the most powerful nation in the world. It is truly remarkable when you reflect on how much has changed and transpired over 200 years. And there is no question that God's hand has been on our people and our land.

Now when we think of America, we can certainly think of that old saying - hot dogs, baseball and apple pie. Or maybe more symbolic icons like the flag, the bald eagle and the liberty bell. Well, there's something else that is just as American as apple pie. And that's the United States Marine Corps. The US Marine Corps was established by an act of the Continental Congress in November 1775, even before our nation existed. And it wears a uniform today that is recognized the world over. Not only do the US Marines secure our ships and fight our battles, they guard our embassies in every corner of the world.

I have always loved their commercials. Like the one a few years back that shows a young man fighting and then slaying a fire-breathing dragon with an Excalibur-like sword. At the end of the commercial, the young man appears as a US Marine, decked out in a resplendent dress blue uniform, with sword gleaming in the light and we hear the words: "The Few-the Proud-the Marines."

TO MAKE DISCIPLES AND TO WIN BATTLES

While we all have undoubtedly heard the Marine's slogan, how many here know the Marine Corps mission statement? You'll find it on their website. It's very straight forward and to the point: *"To make Marines and to Win Battles."*

You ask, "What does that have to do with the Scriptures read for today?" Everything.

My friends, that was Jesus' mission. Not to make marines, but to make disciples and to win battles. Jesus' mission was to make disciples and to win battles; to win the battle against Satan, to win the battle against worldly evil and to win the battle against sin and its effects which is eternal death. And just as Jesus' mission was to make disciples and to win battles, so too that is our mission. We are called to make disciples and to win the battles of life. But before you can do either –you need to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus shows us how to be a disciple in our passage from **Luke 9:51-62**.

KNOW WHO JESUS IS

Jesus knew Who He was. He knew He was the Son of God and the Son of Man. And if we are to be a disciple we need to understand who He is. Remember Fr. Molison's sermon from last week? Earlier in Luke 9, do you remember what Jesus asked His Disciples? Jesus asked them, "Who do men say that I am?" And then he said, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter replied, "***You are the Christ of God.***"

KNOW WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

But not only do we need to know who is Jesus, we need to know who we are in Christ.

The disciples didn't understand who they were in Christ. They were given power to build up and transform lives. Not to tear down and destroy. Yet, when the Samaritans refused to receive them, James and John asked the Lord whether they should command fire to come down from heaven and consume them.

Now what did Jesus say to them earlier in the chapter if a town refused to accept their message? "***Shake off the dust of your feet.***" Not to call down fire on the inhabitants! That's why in some ancient manuscripts of Luke, there is included in verses 55-56 Jesus' words, "***You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.***"

If Jesus' mission is to seek and save the lost, that should be our mission. You see the disciples had been given Christ's authority and power to heal the sick, cast out demons, and proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. Not to call down fire on others. That my friends is judgment. That's God's job not ours. Only God can judge the heart. The disciples no doubt were offended and upset. But they let spiritual pride take control. They had already forgotten Jesus words, "***Whoever wishes to be My disciple must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.***" Taking up your cross doesn't mean blowing people up. It means walking humbly with our God.

You see when you know who you are in Christ, you know that you are nothing without God. That's humility. Humility is recognizing you are nothing without God but with God you have been given all things, you have been redeemed from sin and restored. You have been forgiven and you know you are loved by God. And that's why there is no room for arrogance and pride in the Kingdom. And that means we don't write people off. We don't tear people down even if they reject us or Jesus Christ. That won't bring healing. That won't bring life. That won't solve anything. There is no hope, there is no second chance with that approach.

Jesus said, "***He who humbles himself will be exalted, but he who exalts himself will be humbled.***"

Of course, we can wonder why God doesn't do something about the evil in our world instantly. Mark this down - He will. But right now we are in the age of grace. We are on God's time table not our own. Right now God is patiently waiting for people to turn to Him. So if I am going to be a disciple I need to know Who Jesus is and Who I am in Jesus Christ. But I also need to know something else. I need to know where I am headed.

KNOW WHERE YOU ARE HEADED

Now look back at v. 51. Notice that it read, "***When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set His face to go to Jerusalem.***" Jesus knew where He was headed. Jesus knew His purpose. Why was Jesus to go to Jerusalem. To face the cross. But it wasn't just to die, it was to rise again and to ascend into heaven. Not the words, "Taken up." Jesus was looking to complete His purpose for coming to earth.

Know who you are in Christ. Know where you are headed. We are headed towards heaven. But in order to get to heaven we need to accomplish the work God has given us on earth. And the only way I am going to know the work I am supposed to do on earth is by getting to know God in person. And the way I get to know God in person is by knowing Christ Jesus the Son.

And when I know Christ Jesus the Son, I learn what I need to be doing in this life, how I should live, what my priorities should be in life. You see we are headed to see God face to face. And in the meantime we are to prepare ourselves for this meeting. One day we will stand before God and we will have to give an account for how we lived our lives. And the only thing I will be able to say, point to is what Christ did in me. That's it. It is all for His glory. It's all for the Father's glory. It's not for our glory. By knowing Jesus we learn to be like Jesus, and people will see and hear the difference. They will see Jesus in you.

KNOW WHO IS WITH YOU

Jesus knew the Father was with Him and the Spirit. We have all three with us through the Holy Spirit. Remember what we learned a few weeks ago? Jesus reveals the Father and the Spirit reveals Jesus to us. The only way I will be able to make disciples and win battles is to know Who is the One Who goes with me. When Marines go into battle they know their fellow marines are there to back them up. They know their fellow marines will be with them. When you go into battle, know that there is One who is going to back you up. That's why David could say in Psalm 23, *"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for You, O Lord, are with me, Your rod and Your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

AND DON'T MAKE EXCUSES

And finally if we are going to make disciples and win battles, it means we don't make excuses as to why we can't. Don't rationalize your way out of it. There is no such thing as "but" in the Kingdom. Notice that the last two men who said they would follow Jesus, said "but." You don't say "but" to the King of kings and Lord of lords. You don't say you're going to do it. Just do it. And you do it by faith. All three men wanted to follow Jesus but they weren't willing to give it all up to follow Him.

The only way to be a disciple of Christ is to give it all up in here and now. That's why Jesus said, *"Whoever wishes to lose his life for my sake will gain it, and whoever wishes to gain His life will lose it."*

Being a disciple takes more than good intentions. It takes work and effort. It takes humility and selflessness, it takes a person who knows Jesus, who knows who they are in Christ, who knows where they're headed and who knows who's with them every step of the way. And it's that person who will be able to say, "I make disciples and I win battles." In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!