

Sept. 12, 2010 Luke 14:25-30

WHAT STANDS IN YOUR WAY?

This weekend our country has paused to remember the attacks of 911 and the memories of those who died, and their families. In that tragedy we are reminded about life and death. We are reminded about bravery and sacrifice. We honor them no matter what their religious background, the color of their skin, or what gender they were. For we are all God's people made in His image. Our country paused for a moment of silence on Friday and Saturday to remember this attack which has led to these wars our troops are still fighting where some of our own have been in combat and have been aware that this is war, not all fun and games. We salute all who gave their lives, and those who continue to serve in peaceful places, and those serving on the front lines today.

We remember their sacrifices to give us freedom. And in that idea we remember Jesus who gave his life for our freedom as well, our freedom from sin, from anger, from hatred, from eternal death. Just as our troops face challenges in their duty to this country we have our own challenges.

The original title for today was suppose to be "Challenges We Face" but I changed the title to "What Stands in Your Way?" because I believe we face many challenges every day, challenges that test our faith, our beliefs, the way we live. Sometimes we see some good news like seeing the smiling picture of one of our own on the front page of the Journal last Friday. Way to go, Andrea. And sad to say, sometimes I look at the news and think how awful a world we live in. We hear about people treating each other in such bad ways that often make us sick. Even movies are horrible these days. If it wasn't for the violence, the sex, the car chases, foul language and lots of other stuff, Hollywood would not be able to make a movie or a TV program

worth watching. Sine TV news shows seem to promote controversy for calling it news. I think it just promotes more anger and distractions from God's mission. Even movies for kids have been filled with things we really don't need to fill their minds with. The Scriptures teach that garbage into the mind leads to garbage coming out. Paul tells us we need to have the mind of Christ, which gives us new understanding and hope, not the mind of that sneaky grass crawler that leads to destruction and hurts.

Kids go to college and hopefully are challenged to think for themselves. Sometimes they are influenced by the wrong people. I know of a person who seemed to have a strong faith in God and felt the call to ministry and went to a liberal seminary in the 70's when the teaching was that God was not important, and after taking a few philosophy courses from some liberal professors, he dropped out of school and stopped believing in Jesus. Sometimes the education they receive is not the right one. How sad to read, and I'm sure the college is not proud of the fact, that they have a list of colleges that are the best party colleges. Is that how kids look for a college these days? I thought it was to learn about their interest for the future. Oh silly me. I guess I'm just old fashion. And I did go to college late in life and it was to a Christian college in a small town that was pretty holy itself. We should never forget the Big Guy is still watching no matter where we are.

We the people of God are challenged to live a Holy Life set apart from the way the world lives. We are challenged to bring the gospel message of hope to those who are hurting and who are lost. The church is challenged to be the messenger of God and not water down the Gospel message. We are challenged to live the Christian life all the time not when it is convenient, or when someone is watching.

Today's Scripture lesson is one you all might know about. If your Bibles had headings over certain section this one would perhaps say "The Cost of Discipleship." Let's listen to how Brother Luke describes it because the message to the crowd that followed Jesus that day for a variety of reasons is the same message for the church today. Luke 14:25-33

There it is folks, GOD'S CHALLENGE. Jesus was pretty straight forward. If it was today he might say to those who seek him that they best are prepared for what was to come. The road will be narrow that leads to a great life because few are willing to do what they need to do to travel it. They get distracted by the things around them. If you don't think so, look around at what tries to distract YOU from following Jesus closely. They failed to understand that it costs something in order to continue their journey. But no matter the cost, it is well worth it to follow Jesus to and through the gates of heaven. In fact elsewhere in Scripture we are told several times that do all you can, sell all you have, in order to have that relationship with Jesus? Don't let anything get in your way of having that precious jewel known as eternal life with God.

You might ask how that fits into today's world, into our world, into YOUR world. Let me put it to you this way... I believe Jesus is saying to all of us it's time to make a decision to live the life we proclaim. There is so much anger and hatred these days in the world, even among those who call themselves Christians, even among those who say they believe in God. I struggled this past week with the pastor in Florida who wants to burn the Koran in the sake of God. How many converts to Christianity will that bring? On the other hand I told some of you how a Christian used the Koran to lead those who were Muslim to Christ while he was in prison for trying to convert others. Is it not the love of God that we show that leads to salvation in Jesus? Didn't Jesus love us and that is why he went to the cross? Didn't God

love us and that's why he sent his son so we could be freed? Anger destroys, love builds up. We need to remember we aren't Christians just on Sunday morning while we sit in the pew listening to the preacher preach. God expects us to be Christians 24/7/365 days of the year. Jesus said to those who were following to stop and think about what they were doing. Stop and think about why they were following him. Is it to get something for nothing? They will fail. Or are they there because they believe in his message? They will be blessed. I guess I could ask you why you are a Christian and I bet I'd get a variety of reasons. It isn't the fact of becoming a Christian, its being a Christian and walking and talking like one in all that you do. You've heard me say how some people go to church and when they enter the doors they change. They become caring, loving, attentive, and almost saintly. But when they go back into the world after worship, the minute the church door slams on their backside they go back to being their old nasty self. Admit it. You've seen people like that. And some people will say that is why they don't go to that church anymore. I don't think that is what Jesus was thinking when he called people to follow him. In fact when he called the disciples to follow he called them to leave everything behind and come be his followers in order for him to train them how to accept people, how to challenge people, how to minister to their needs. We have the message of hope and life through Jesus. He offers the fresh air of a new life right here and now.

In this passage Jesus challenges them to put everything else aside and make him number one. Isn't that what happens in the sports world? Teams are looking for those players who will dedicate their total being to be the best player one can be. It takes dedication. It sometimes takes years.

You know when you think about it God has been challenging people since the beginning of time. When you read old stories of our faith you see them. From Abraham and Sarah who were challenged to leave

their home and go where God led, to Moses leading the people to the promise land we see one challenge after the other. We read in the first 5 books of the Bible the challenges the people faced and how some fared well while others failed. Caleb and Joshua spy out the promise land with 10 other guys and come back saying it might be a challenge to take that land, but with God on their side it could be done. The other 10 said, man they are huge people over on the other side. They look like giants. Standing next to them we would look like ants. They are big, tough, and they could lick us with one hand behind their backs. These 10 said that instead of going forward, they might want to return to Egypt and maybe Pharaoh will go soft on them. Joshua and Caleb challenged them not to look at the giants, but look at what their God had already done, and what he promised them he would do. Or as Joshua said some 40 years later to their kids, “you guys need to decide who you are going to follow. But as for me and my family we will serve our Lord.” Because they failed to trust in God, this generation of travelers would not enter the promise land. They were right at its doorstep and God said forget it. They would wander for 40 years before their families would be able to find rest while they who were on the brink of the Promised Land would die in the dessert.

Jesus challenges all of us to trust in him. Isn't that what our faith is all about? When things don't go like we want Jesus challenges us to keep going. We aren't to be fair weather Christians; we are to be sanctified, holy people who trust in our God.

One day Paul stood before some high officials who were interested in knowing why Paul, someone who used to arrest Christians and put them to death, now was one of them and even proclaimed his faith in Jesus the Christ. This king called Paul to come tell his story. Well if you understand Paul, all he needed was an opportunity to share God's message with whoever would listen. So when he got the invitation to speak, and by the way, he was under house arrest at that time waiting

to go to Rome to stand trial, he stood before King Agrippa and Festus and preached with boldness. Agrippa said, “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time?” Paul challenged the king with these words, “Whether it is a short or a long time, I pray to God that not only you but every person listening to me today would be saved and be like me-except for these chains I have.”

You know Paul could have asked the King the same question that is the title of this sermon. He could have challenged Agrippa with these words: “King Agrippa, what stands in your way to follow your heart? Is it fear of the unknown? Is it because you don’t think you’re good enough? Is it because of all the stuff you have done wrong? What stands in your way from accepting the facts found in the writings of the prophets that speak about the Messiah who was to come?” Aren’t those some of the reasons some might struggle with today? You know, Agrippa and Festus just left....but I bet their minds were challenged even though they rejected the message. Isn’t that what happens today? Many hear from God, but they just walk away.

What stands in your way? That’s a hard question for some. You see, we always want to be liked and if we decide to pick up our cross and follow Jesus then some of that junk that has accumulated in our hearts has to go. If we want to be more like Jesus it will take work, a new thinking, having the mind of Christ. We will not only need to seek forgiveness we will need to offer forgiveness to others. We will have to walk the walk and not just talk the talk. We will have to show others the love of Christ in word and indeed.

Think you are ready for that? You see coming to church is part of the preparation. You need to learn what it means to live a Christian life in all things. And as we all know, that can be tough. It comes down to this. Will we say no to those things we know we should not do or say or will we be like everyone else who seems to think some of this

worldly stuff is okay? What stands in your way of putting your Christian faith into practice beyond these 4 walls? You think others will make fun of you or even decide they would not hang around with you? You know we teach the kids about saying “no” when someone asks then if they want some pot, or other drugs or a swig of alcohol. We do that because we know what the long term effects are...they might get hooked and their lives will be changed. We have those sex talks trying to tell kids to abstain from sexual activity because if they don't before they know it kids are having kids and we know how that will change their lives. In one town where I served some of the girls thought it was a game to see who could become pregnant. What a shame.....and look at the cost to them and their families.

Do you think you always have to do what others do in order to be accepted? Isn't that the wrong thinking? And don't we try and teach our kids not to think like that? Don't we always want our kids to learn from our mistakes? Don't you think God wants us to learn from the mistakes of others we read about in the Bible?

Jesus said to those who followed that in order to be his follower you need to make him the top priority. If we truly want to ask God to do something for us, shouldn't we be willing to listen to him and follow him because he has all the answers? Pick up your cross, don't be afraid to follow, don't be afraid to live by Christian principles, and don't be afraid to be like Jesus to those who turn against you or think you are a Jesus fanatic. Hey, I'd rather be a Jesus fanatic than to spend the rest of eternity in a place where his name is never worshipped or lifted up in praise.

So what stands in your way of forgiving that person who has hurt you the most? What stands in your way offering that person who has angered you? Is it pride? Is it a feeling that the hurt is too deep, too painful? Would you rather hold on to it the rest of your life than to

ask God to forgive you? What stands in your way of totally surrendering to God? I don't mean just some things I mean all things. What stuff do you still hold on to that you refuse to let go of? Don't you think it's time to release it to God? I know how hard that is....but God wants all our worship, all our devotion, all our attention, all our trust so that he can give us all the blessings he has stored for us.

What stands in your way? I think today would be a good day to lay those things aside, don't you ?