

May 28, 2017

## **Bought with a Price**

### PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

### SERMON

Today we hear the first reading about Jesus's ascension going back to the follower after the resurrection. This is the last appearance that Jesus makes to his disciples. It is a time of departure but is also a time of promise. It's a promise that they will not be left alone. It is the promise that the Holy Spirit will be with them. That time is coming. Jesus has already told them that he would not leave them comfortless and would send the Holy Spirit, the advocate. And so, they see in I'm sure mixed emotions, the risen Lord ascending to Heaven. And then they go back.

They have been trained for three years. They had been taken out of their lives. They have devoted themselves to following Jesus in the best of times. The great celebrations that they had with Jesus as they fed 5,000 people, as they witnessed the healing of so many people. As they went from village to village and their numbers grew. Those who began to believe that Jesus was in fact the Christ, the Messiah. They have come to that point where they know as Jesus says in his prayer that they have come to know that he is the son of God. And so, they go back into Jerusalem. And they prepare themselves to begin the task for which they had been trained. To speak out, to share the gospel.

We hear in the letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, that the path is not an easy one for those who believe that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus, I think, helped prepare the disciples for that. That what he was training them for and getting them ready for was not some great privilege but a great responsibility. They were not about to have a very easy time in their lives. Sharing the gospel and trying to get others to come to know what they have come to know that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. The one who has made it possible for all people to know that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. Who has made it possible for them to know the one true God. That God loves them. And has joined with humanity in order to bring salvation to humanity. It's going to be a difficult task and we know that that was true because of all the disciples, all the original apostles.

Only one, John, seems to have died a natural death. All the others faced death at the hands of others. Persecutors of the church, people who were offended by the good news. Seems very strange to us that people who were bringing news of salvation would be hated so. But it's hard to change people's minds about how they believe. It's hard to change people's minds that they are not in the world only for themselves to get as much resources for themselves as they

possibly can. To get as much wealth, to get as much power and authority for themselves as they possibly can so that they can run their lives as they wish to.

It is not a welcome teaching or word when you are told that our lot in life is to share. Is to be children of God who are grateful to God for what we have received and are willing to share it with one another. And to call others to become a part of that community. One where we see it not necessary to own everything in sight but to see the need in our communities. To see that it necessary for people to have justice and mercy and dignity in the living of their lives. That's the message. That was the message that the disciples were given. That God's desire, the one true God's desire for creation, for humanity was to live together and know the love of God, an unconditional love of God. A love that was so great that God joined with humanity. Came into the world to embrace us and to share with us that something was being done so that we might have a relationship with God that reflects the relationship of humanity and divinity that we see in Jesus' life and in his living.

Where we see that we are called to be in that same kind of relationship. An intimate relationship with our creator, redeemer, sustainer. And to see one another as brothers and sisters. To see one another as beloved children of God. And to be willing to treat one another as beloved children of God. No matter where they come from. No matter what they believe. No matter if they proclaim themselves to be our enemies. Because Jesus was very clear as he instructed his disciples. Love one another as I have loved you. Pray for your enemies and those who persecute you. That's a hard road to travel because sometimes praying and forgiving those who persecute you does not stop the persecution, does not stop killing.

We see it in the first century church as the good news is being spread by those who choose to follow Jesus. To learn of God's ways, to live God's ways and to share it with others. They did not escape suffering. They did not escape persecution. They did not escape death at the hands of others. And yet, we never hear complaints from those martyrs who died in the hands of God. Who knew that they had traveled a course that was right and was true. They were in relationship with their creator. They suffered not from doing wrong but for proclaiming another way. A way of love, a way of peace. A way of mercy and justice. That brought them to sometimes a quite horrible end. And yet, their faith was not shaken.

Even today, so many Christians suffer and die for the faith that they believe. Because they know to turn away from it is not life. It's turning away from the truth that they have come to know and to hold dearly. That the creator loves his children. And even those who turn away, his love for them is not diminished. And we are called to love and care for them as well. Hard thing to do. Impossible thing to do, in the same way that God does. And yet that is the great calling of the Christian to hold to that faith. To believe that salvation comes as a gift from God and grace from God. And having received that gift to have our lives changed. To move more and more closely to reflect the life of Jesus. A life of sacrifice if need be. A life of justice and mercy and forgiveness.

That is a life we are called to as Christians. Sometimes we'd like to have it otherwise. We'd like to have a God not like the people that we don't like or at least God not like the people who don't like us because we are Christians. And yet, everything we see in the scripture is that God's love is complete for everyone. And that is his desire for all people. Sometimes it's a way of suffering, sometimes we forget that because in our country we have the freedom to express our belief. The freedom to express the love of God. And for it to generally, not all the time, but generally to be accepted. But when we speak about the love of God and the love of Jesus Christ, we don't expect to be persecuted for that. And I think that sometimes we forget that it is not that way in other parts of the world. Where to be a Christian, is to be persecuted. And yet, faith endures. And in many ways, is expressed in tremendous ways. Even in the midst of suffering, and even in the midst of death.

As I was working on this sermon and reading the proper's knowing that it was also Memorial Day weekend, I couldn't help but begin to compare our military men and women through the ages. People who had a calling, not unlike the disciples. Calling to stand and stand up for the beliefs of a country that guards freedom, that guards liberty, that guards the right for us to be able to express our faith. For us to live the life that we think is right and good. Even if it is not accepted by everybody. What that is and what is the best way to live. What is the best way to travel through life. These men and women stood for people's rights to choose to walk a path and because of that many died. Sacrificed their lives, not unlike Jesus. Not unlike the early Christians who stood fast for what they believed was right, what was true. And not just for our nation, not just for our country but had been called upon to stand up for those who are being defeated. To stand up for those who are being persecuted, to stand up for the rights and liberty that we believe all human beings should have. And men and women have gone, and fought, and died in many places of the world. In order to help protect those who cannot protect themselves. And that is part of our honoring of this holiday of Memorial Day. To honor those who stood fast in their beliefs just like the early Christians, just like Christians in so many parts of the world today. Who are willing to proclaim that it is the right of people to have an opportunity to live with basic rights and freedoms. And so many times they suffer. So many times, they die.

I have the great privilege of meeting with the men's breakfast group each Wednesday. And of the eight people who are really the members, five have dedicated their lives to serving in the military. And sometimes they allow themselves to share some of what they have seen and experienced. As they have stood for, not only the defense of our country and the defense of our rights and liberties. To be sent out to help guard the rights of others. And just like a Christians, it often leads to suffering. And too many times they have seen brothers and sisters die. It is a tremendous reminder to me as one who has not served in the military. That there is a group of people that surrounds us who suffer and from time to time die for us and for so many others. We need to remember them in our prayers. We need to be reminded from time to time, that what we take for granted. What we accept so easily maybe not take for granted but what we accept so easily is not so and is bought with a price. And to honor those who have

paid the greatest price of all. Those who have fought and who have died for the life that we live. And for the world to be a more stable place than it would be and more people having an opportunity to live freely with basic rights, with basic liberties. Let us remember those who have given their lives for their faith. For those who have dedicated themselves to this country and given their lives for the life that we enjoy.