

Midweek Lenten Worship & Sermon, 3.25.20

Series: The Son of God Goes Forth to War

Theme:

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus. I am glad that you spending time in prayer and meditation on God's Word. Our theme for this evening is "The Warrior (Jesus), Rejected by Many Followers." For many people, Jesus wasn't what they expected. They wanted something different in Messiah. What are you looking for in a Savior? God bless and strengthen you to follow him through this time in his Word: We begin...

A Prayer:

O Lord, your Word is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and for training in righteousness. Guide our footsteps by your Word so that we may remain steadfast in faith, love you with all our hearts, and love our neighbor as ourselves; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

A Reading from the Psalm: Psalm 119:105-112

A Hymn: What Wondrous Love is This (v. 1)

The Sermon Text: John 6:66-68

The Sermon Theme: The Warrior Rejected by Many Followers

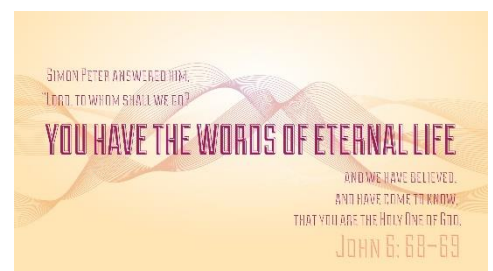
Maybe you've seen the pictures, basketball arenas sitting empty, usually full this time of year. Like the arenas that went from full and alive to empty in no time, Jesus' following seems to have done the same. For two years crowds were following Jesus, big crowds that could fill a basketball arena. Two separate times, Jesus fed 5k and 4k. How many were there total with all the woman and children present? Thousands. There was a growing sentiment by the crowds, "We need to make Jesus our king." At point they were ready to do it by force. They wanted the free food and free health care, Jesus driving away sickness and disease. But then, one by one, they began to realize Jesus wasn't the kind of Promised Savior they were looking for. One by one they began to leave. The crowds of thousands apparently dwindled to hundreds and then maybe a few dozen.

As the crowds dwindled with disappointment over who Jesus was, John reports us Jesus words to the disciples one day, **"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the twelve. Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life'" (Jn 6:67-68).**

How did it come to this, that so many left Jesus' side? They had forgotten about the beautiful promises of the Old Testament prophets that promised a Savior from sin, one who bring forgiveness to lowly and broken hearted. They wanted someone who would throw out the hated Romans and give them food and health. How did all this happen? An enemy had been at work! He had sown seeds that undermined the truth of the Bible. He had convinced the Spiritual leaders of Israel they needed to look out for number one, "me first, nation first" was their mentality.

The day before Jesus asked this question to the disciples, the crowds had tried to take Jesus by force to be their king. Jesus resisted. But the next day the crowd found Jesus and the conversation turned to food, to bread, "Jesus had said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (Jn 6:35).

They had bread on their mind, but the bread Jesus wanted to give them was different than what they had on their mind. Jesus tells them he is bread from heaven, all who had faith in him would live ... and live forever! And there is more. He



would raise them up on the last day. Pretty good offer from Jesus, but many had stopped listening, it wasn't what they expected. They turned around and headed home.

But it wasn't just the crowds of thousands that left Jesus. What does the verse before us today say? "Many disciples turned back." They said, "This is a hard teaching, who can accept this" (Jn 6:60). It wasn't that they didn't understand or perceive what Jesus was saying, they said they couldn't accept it. Jesus was saying that in him was life from God, through faith in him a person has life, eternal life. He was saying he was sent from the Father. They perceived what Jesus was saying, but they lacked the commitment to follow him.

As Jesus, our Warrior, is getting ready for his greatest battle of all, as he gets ready to go to the cross. Many of his troops turn around and go home. They reject his leadership. They don't believe he is from the Father and that he can give them eternal life. Many of his disciples weren't as committed it turns out. How sad when Jesus' own reject him.

The forces of the enemy, they are strong in this world, aren't they? So many who were seemingly loyal and committed followers of Jesus – they fell away. The enemy is still at work today. How does he lead loyal, committed followers away from Jesus?

He sows seeds of false doctrine in the church. These seem small at first, questioning one part of the Bible and then another. He uses voices in Christian universities and in politics to damage and destroy faith. He gets them to twist God's Word a little and then a lot and then abandon it all together until you get this large segment of people who in Christian research today are called, "The nones." Those who claim to have no religious affiliation. Their spiritual they claim, but they've believed the lie that they can separate from religion, their relationship with God is based on whatever they feel is best. Maybe it is their actions or their meditations or how they feel. The enemy slowly finds ways to separate people from the church and Jesus, the one who is the way, the only way to the Father, the only one who can give life.

Within our own church, there are some who have enthusiastically promised to be faithful followers of Jesus, they promised to be faithful to Jesus and his Word, but they have turned back. Something has led them to find joy somewhere other than Jesus and his Word.

Maybe you know of someone who is slipping, who is turning back from their commitment to Jesus. Maybe you have struggled with your own doubts and questions. I think all the disciples did. We will have those doubts and questions too.

Jesus question is for us too, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the twelve" (Jn 6:67). We have the same answer as the twelve, no, we don't want to leave Jesus and his Word. But in our seeking peace, in seeking for self-help, do we unknowingly begin to listen to other voices, voices that begin to have more importance than Jesus' voice? Voices that when followed only turn us back to ourselves, to trust in ourselves? Do we fully realize what trust in ourselves will lead? It will lead to separation, eternal separation from God in hell.

Jesus lovingly looks at you and me with his question gives us the opportunity to clarify for ourselves, to recommit to following the voice that leads to eternal life. You wonder how it went down when Jesus asked this question. Did some hesitate? Did they wait to see what the others would say? We don't know, but this we do know:

We love Peter's answer. **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). I love Peter here because he is so right: "Lord, I don't see where else we'd go, you have the words of eternal life."**

God's words are powerful. From creation he spoke and things that were not, came into existence. Light, and dirt and rocks and trees and stars and lions and butterflies – a universe beyond our tracing out. He spoke and it came to be.

In God's Word, the Bible, you have the power of salvation. You have the story of God's Son, a warrior, who won your eternal life by stomping on death and the devil at the cross and empty tomb. In God's word you have the power of salvation for all who believe. **"Faith comes through hearing the message and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17).**

Every single person in the world who has come to faith in Christ was brought to faith by the power of God's Word. It creates saving faith in hearts. You don't want to leave Jesus and his Word, it is powerful, it brought you to trust in Jesus'

sacrifice on the cross. It brought you to see there is a way out of this sinful world to heaven, through God's love in dying for you! His sacrifice paid for every last sin of yours, he paid it all!

You can see why Jesus fought false teaching so hard, why he said watch out for false teachers. Why didn't he tone back his message a little bit so the crowds loved him, so that they didn't leave and they hang around? There is only one place to go for eternal life, the words of Jesus!

Peter and the other disciples and you and me – we don't want to lose what Jesus has given us. Jesus is speaking to us every time we take time to listen to his Word. He promises to take us safely through the gate marked "eternal life." He is the way, the truth, the life!

We are challenged every day to hold on tightly to God's Word when we see and hear all the stuff the world, our sinful nature and the enemy Satan throw at us. It is a flood of false narratives. Ask yourself, "Is this information that is coming at me bringing me closer to my Savior and his Words or is it causing a separation from my Savior?" If the answer to our Savior's question is the same as Peter's, "Lord, where else do we go, You have the words of eternal life." Then fix your eyes on Jesus and his Word, his dying, his rising from the dead. There is a steady stream of what you need to follow him to everlasting life. Amen.

Closing Prayer¹:

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Further Reading:

- Read the Passion History: Matthew 27:1-26

Closing Hymn: What Wondrous Love is This, v. 3 & 4

¹ *Luther's Evening Prayer*