

July 7 2013

Scripture Lesson ~ Galatians 5:22-26

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Sermon *Following Jesus*

I am not really a World War II expert by any stretch of the imagination. I really hate to admit this to anybody, but one of my favorite movies of all time was Patton starring George C. Scott. The scene I remember the most in the movie was that opening, maybe those of you who watched the movie can remember what that scene is. For in it Scott, who played the part of that controversial World War II general, George S. Patton, is shown sort of pacing up and down on a stage in full dress uniform in front of a huge American flag. He is addressing his troops before battle in very what I would call colorful language. He tells the men the how they are going to kick the enemy from one of the battle field to another in the upcoming battle. Whether or not if I approve Patton's choice of language or his tactics his pep talks like the one in the opening scene must have had some inspirational affect because the troops under Patton's command are known to have risen to the challenge at very crucial times during the war, time and time and time again.

Jesus is speaking in today's Gospel lesson to 70 of his disciples who are about to begin their first missionary journey. It is a crucial time in their ministry as well. Jesus knows what lies ahead for him in Jerusalem but in the time that he has left he is quite concerned that his followers get the proper training to carry on his ministry after he is no longer physically with them on this earth. This missionary journey will be then be their first test in how they perform and will have bearing on the future of what we would know as the Christian movement. It is a kind of test time, in wanting to leave with nothing to chance. So Jesus gathers these 70 followers around himself for a pep talk that I believe they never did forget.

The first lesson that I think we learn from Jesus' pep talk, as Joyce shared with us in Luke's Gospel. It did not come from something that Jesus said but something Jesus did. Luke tells us he sent the disciples out on their first missionary trip how...two by two. I think this action can give us a good plan to follow as we prepare to work together in the time we have ahead. The plan is this; we are not asked to go about God's work by ourselves. There are times all of us, and pastors are the worst of us, we like to think we don't need anybody's help when we are doing our life's work. We move off into our own little corner, and the next thing we know that the task that we are working on overwhelms us. We get discouraged and then we want to quit. Or another thing that happens; when we communicate

with each other the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing and the result is the same. We work inefficiently. We don't work together. Of course, one of the most common things that happens along these lines is that a small percentage of people end of doing most of God's work. But to all of these things Jesus says no. The way to do the work of a disciple is to do it together, cooperating with one another and working together. We are the body of Christ and we need each other to do the task that lies ahead. The work is done faster; the work is done more efficiently, and I think it is a whole lot more fun as well.

The second lesson for us this morning comes from Jesus' opening statement in his pep talk and it goes like this; the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into this harvest. We in the church, I think, have a tendency, especially in smaller towns like Newport, to feel that our ministry doesn't matter a whole lot. We figure in a town our size with as many churches as we have that pretty much everything gets covered, everything gets taken care of. There is not that much for us to do, but this I think leads to a sense of feeling very useless and discouraged. It is totally the opposite of what Jesus is telling us here. Jesus says the harvest is great and with every member of every church in this town in worship today, there is still a whole lot that needs to be done. As long as there are human beings there will be human needs physically, spiritually, physiological. I think we are kidding ourselves if we think, here in Newport, that there is nothing for us to do as a church.

The third lesson for us comes from what Jesus has to say this morning about the clothing, money and those meals for that journey, In his pep talk Jesus tells his disciples to look beyond the basics; food, clothing and shelter for that journey upon which he sends them. Notice that he makes every provision for them but they were not the main goals for that trip. The point here is disciples are to avoid getting bogged down in the details so they can keep the main purposes of the trip in front of them in all time. There is something here for us in Newport UCC as well. In our meetings, in our working together, in our worship it is easy to be caught up in the nit picking details and lose sight of the goals from which we work. I can talk about this now since I am in a new congregation. I remember one church council meeting in a former congregation that I served in which we more time talking about plastic communion cups sticking in the trays during communion than we talked about anything else during the entire meeting. Not that these things are not important, but we have to keep sight of the goal and that goal is serving God and serving others.

The final lesson, I like to suggest, comes from Jesus' advice in his pep talk about what to do when we fail in the ministry. We all make mistakes. We will make many mistakes together before things are done in the years ahead. But Jesus'

words here for us don't dwell on the negative but move forward into the positive. Jesus tells his disciples, and this sounds a little rough, "shake off the dust from your feet and move on when a town rejects you." And we in a sense can do the same thing when we fail. We aren't to feel sorry for ourselves. We aren't not to wallow in our pity but instead we are called upon Jesus to keep ourselves up and dust our selves off and move along toward better things.

So if you don't remember four points: don't go your ministry alone: there is always plenty for us to do: keep your eyes on the goal, and don't dwell on the mistakes of the past. That was the pep talk, How did the game come out? Verses 17 through 20 tells us what was the results of this first missionary journey was. The disciples seem to have come through their journey with flying colors this time as it says, they returned with joy. "For even the demons are subject to us in your name" as they tell Jesus. Jesus himself speaks of the vision of the final fall of evil as a result of God's power. The point here is not the disciples listened well to Jesus' advice or even that there trip was a good experience for them, although both of these things seem to be the case. No, the point is whatever they did on that missionary trip, they did not of themselves but they did in the name and with the power of the Jesus Christ. You and I have an opportunity to in the months and years ahead as we work together to tap into that power; tap into that enthusiasm which comes from Jesus. We can only succeed; we can only succeed, if what we do, if we do what we do in Jesus name. So Jesus says the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few so pray therefore the Lord of the Harvest will send out laborers into the harvest.

And together we say AMEN