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Lent Rotation 2020 – The Son of God Goes Forth to War

John 6:66-68 – The Warrior Rejected by Many Followers

Do you remember the story of Gideon – that old Bible history, Sunday School story of Gideon, one of the judges of Israel, the guy God called to deliver his people from the Midianites? If you remember his story, chances are you remember that he was the guy who amassed a pretty sizeable army at first – but then God said it was too big. So everyone who was scared to fight got to leave. But it was still too big, so everyone who got down on their knees when they drank water from a spring got sent home too. And that’s how God managed to send Gideon into battle not with 32,000 soldiers like he had at first, but with 300. You think Gideon might’ve had some questions about what exactly God was doing right then?

Well I wonder if Peter might’ve thought the same thing here in our story for today. The Son of God was gearing up to go to war against all the powers of sin and death and the devil, but he had just ruffled so many feathers that many if not most of his followers had turned their backs and headed home. See, Jesus had just finished feeding the 5,000 the day before. Well the Jews were so happy and impressed that they decided that they wanted to make Jesus their king right then and there – they could already see the health and wealth and prosperity and full bellies that he could provide for them at the snap of a finger.

But then the next day came, and Jesus wasn’t as excited about that plan as they were. In fact, he almost scolded them that they didn’t understand what he was really trying to get at. Jesus told them earlier in John 6, “*Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*”

And right there was the kicker – Jesus was looking toward eternity, but the people only cared about the here and now. So when Jesus didn’t give them what they wanted, they left. Lots of people had been following Jesus as long as the action was still good and the miracles and messages were still entertaining, but as soon as Jesus got to the point that he was more interested in changing hearts and eternities than quality of life and tax brackets, the people left him standing there, with maybe nobody else but the twelve disciples still by his side.

It’s a sad picture, and one that’s easy for us to shake our heads at. How could people be so shallow, and how could they turn on Jesus so quickly? Well, in this season of Lent, let’s not act like we’ve gotten so much better. Have you ever thought that church is just too early on a Sunday morning, and you need your rest? Have you ever thought that unless we have really good children’s programs or more relevant preaching and worship that we won’t be able to grow like other congregations do? Have you ever thought that talking about Jesus and his love for us is okay, but our stances on marriage and family and sexuality just really need to loosen up? Or have

you ever thought that you might be willing to serve in the church, but if you have to ask for money or canvass the streets, that’s a dealbreaker? Let’s be honest. There still a part of each of us, too, that would follow the rest of that line right out of Jesus’ presence.

But you know, Peter – for all his faults and compulsiveness – got it just right here. He might not have known what Jesus had in mind or why he was doing what he was doing or how he was going about it, but when Jesus asked if he and the other disciples wanted to leave, he hit the nail right on the head: “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*”

Peter knew that what was important about Jesus wasn’t what they could get out of him here and now. It wasn’t the entertainment. It wasn’t any *thing* at all. It was his words, because they had divine power to bring eternal life like nothing else ever would or could. And friends, that’s what our God wants us to see here today too. The Son of God went forth to war as Peter and the other disciples stood by his side, and still today he fights for us and for our souls as well. And he does it in just the same way as he did back then, with the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. It is with this weapon that he strikes down those sinful attitudes and temptations we all have, he opens our hearts to the forgiveness he won for us on the cross, he conquers death and breaks the chains of hell that Satan’s wrapped around us, and it is with this Word that he will one day raise us back up from the dust to live forever with him in heavenly Paradise.

Where else could the disciples find something like that? Where could they go to find something that compares, or where could we go nowadays? Not to other religions, not to pop culture, not to philosophy, not to academics, not to materialism, not to politics – only to the words that came from Jesus’ lips. Other things might satisfy their stomachs for right now, but nothing could ever possibly satisfy their hearts for eternity. And still now today too, the words we gather around here in church might not glitter and gleam and stand out like some other places do, but they are the words of eternal life – so who cares what the world says, because *that’s* what truly matters. So friends, let’s learn them, let’s love them, and let’s cling to them faithfully, now and always.

You know, it’s funny to think about Gideon sweating as he watched all those men leave his army – especially since we know the outcome. God was just getting ready to do something great through Gideon, and he found out that when they went forth to war that day, it was much better to do it with God’s strength than with man’s strength, because God’s strength is what won the victory. That’s what Peter found out in our story for today too, and that’s what Jesus wants us to see here as well. Many followers may have rejected this warrior, but our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will never reject us. Our confidence, our victory – it’s not based on numbers or popularity. It’s based on God’s promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation won through the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us. So friends, this Lent as we remember once more how the Son of God goes forth to war for our sake, let’s always take up the Sword of the Spirit right along with him, because for our own hearts and for this world around us, they are and will always be the words of eternal life. Amen.