

First Baptist Church of Fitchburg

1400 John Fitch Highway Fitchburg, MA 01420 Phone# 978-345-5622

June 14th, 2020, 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, Flag Day

Pastor: Rev. Meredith H. Christian



Welcome and Announcements:

Good morning Congregation, and happy Flag day! As many of you are aware, summer brings with it a chance to serve our younger community at our camp and conference centers, and so I am even now preparing for the 2020 season up at Oceanwood. Details will be forthcoming as to how this may further effect services. Even so, I am always just an email or phone call away, and can come back into town if the need should arise. I will still be available during normal office hours this week.

You are also most welcome to share your concerns and celebrations with me or your deacons, who will forward them to myself directly if desired. My email is meredithhchristian@gmail.com and phone is (774) 276-0505.

Call to Worship: (In Unison)

Let us offer to God a Thanksgiving offering of worship; a sacrifice of praise and call on the Name of the Lord. Let us fulfil our vow to honor the Lord in the presence of all His people and glorify His Holy Name

Invocation:

We address You, Lord, as our heavenly Father, for You have given us life. You sustain us and provide for us. You love us and discipline us. You have promised us a home forever, eternal in the heavens. Hear our praises and prayers, and help us to love and honor You all of our days, for we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Gloria Patri:

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be
world without end. Amen, Amen.*

Hymn: "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" #422 (Click on link->)

First Reading: *Isaiah 35:3-8a* (NASB)

"Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come (with) vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah (desert). The scorched land will become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, grass (becomes) reeds and rushes. A highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness."

Celebrations and Concerns:

Prayers for Eric, as he heals from a **non**-Covid-19 related illness. Continued prayers for Roberta, Mark and other church members struggling in body, mind and spirit this week.

Prayers for our camps, Grotonwood and Oceanwood, who will be opening up in different capacities over the next few weeks.

May the Lord protect our properties and all who walk within them and allow nothing whatsoever to harm them, staff, visitor, or guest, in Jesus name.

Silent Prayer: Let us take our silent petitions before the Lord.

Pastoral Prayer:

Dear God, we address You as Father, Creator, Provider and Protector, as we raise our prayers of thanksgiving for the founding fathers of our faith, and respective nations, namely the men and women who have served in forming, and sacrificing for the benefit of each of us here today. We express our gratitude for the sacrifices made on our behalf, for the investment of time, energy, and money, and especially for the investments of love and care. We also express our gratitude for the examples of life, morality, and faith. These may have not been perfect, yet we have received from them a standard by which to judge and govern our lives.

We also pray on behalf of our parents and grandparents because we know they need You in their lives. They need Your wisdom, for they must make many hard decisions. They need Your pardon, for they, like others, have fallen short of Your will at times. They need Your strength and health, for they are subject to various illnesses and weaknesses, none more so lately than the Coronavirus that threatens so many of our elders. They need Your Holy Spirit, Lord, for their faith must remain strong in these difficult times, as we pray the prayer given to us by the Founder of our faith, Jesus Christ,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Children's Message: (Offered by Debi Cross)

A Home Run – or not

Theme: Loving others

Scripture: Matthew 22:37-39



Today's story is about a girls' softball team. One day they were playing a game against a rival team. It was an exciting game because the score was so close. Right up to the last inning the score was tied.

One of the girls came up to the plate and got ready for the pitch. The pitcher wound up and threw the ball, the girl swung the bat with all her might and WHAM! - the ball soared out over the fence for a home run. Her teammates were so excited they were all jumping up and down, yelling, "We won! We won!"

However, when the girl hit the ball, she twisted her ankle so badly she couldn't run. And according to the rules, even if you hit the ball over the fence you still have to run around and touch all the bases in order for it to count as a run. But she couldn't even walk, let alone run! So she began crawling down to first base.

Her teammates thought about helping her, but that's against the rules.

Then something very unusual happened. Two of the girls from the opposite team came over, picked her up and carried her around so she could touch each of the bases. Of course, by helping her score, it meant they themselves would lose the game.

Well, those girls may not have thought of it this way, but by doing what they did, they were living one of Jesus' most important commands: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

You see, Jesus said there are two great commandments. Let me read you Matthew 22:37-39: "Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" You see, not only should we love God, but we should love other people, too.

How much are we willing to love other people? Are we willing to love someone else so much we'd give up something we really want – like winning the game – to help her? I hope so because Jesus tells us we should.

That's something we should pray about: *Heavenly Father, we know that your Son Jesus tells us to love other people, but sometimes we forget and sometimes it's really hard. But we want to please you, so we ask that you help us to be better at it. And we ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Youth Message: (Offered by Catherine Robertson)

LESSON JUNE 14th – PART B: Elisha's servant: Gehazi:

We concluded last week with the **WOW** words of Naaman: **"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."** YES! That's what Elisha wanted him to know, (v8) **GOD is AMAZING!**

Reading the rest of his sentence: **"please accept a present from your servant,"** we see that Naaman returned to say thank you, (something the 9 lepers never did), he also wanted to honor the prophet with gifts. Hear what Elisha, the man of God, the prophet says: **"As the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!"** Naaman tries again, but again Elisha **refuses**. Naaman responds:

"If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the LORD."

Wow! What a vow! Naaman accepted the fact that there is **NO** God anywhere except in Israel, **AND** he makes the immediate commitment that he will follow no other God but the God of Israel! **WOW!** **God** was at **work** in Naaman -- Naaman takes the God of Israel into his heart! **A holy work!**

There is a bit of a problem though, for which Naaman asks forgiveness, on an on-going basis. He says: **"when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count."** Elisha tells him to **"go in peace."** And this should be the end of this sacred account. **But it's not!** Because after all this holiness, Gehazi pops up **and sins**. ☹

Here's what happens next: (II Kings 5):

²⁰Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, **thought**, **"My master has let that Aramean Naaman off too lightly** by not accepting from him what he offered. **As the LORD lives**, I will run after him and get **something out of him."** ²¹So Gehazi went after Naaman. When Naaman saw someone running after him, **he jumped down from the chariot to meet him** and said, "Is everything all right?" ²²He replied, "Yes, but my **master has sent me to say**, 'Two members of a company of prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim; please **give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing."** ²³Naaman said, "Please accept **two** talents." He urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and **gave them to two of his servants**, who carried them in front of Gehazi. ²⁴When Gehazi came to the citadel, he took the bags from them, and **stored them inside**; he dismissed the men, and they left.

²⁵He went in and stood before his master; and Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" He answered, **"Your servant has not gone anywhere at all."** ²⁶But he said to him, "Did I not go with you in spirit when someone left his chariot to meet you? Is this a time to accept money and to accept clothing, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves?" ²⁷**Therefore** the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you, **and** to your descendants forever." **So Gehazi left his presence leprous, as white as snow."**

S C A R Y !

Does it seem too unfair that Gehazi will have leprosy upon him **and his family forever?**

Did Elisha punish him? Did God punish him? Hmmm?

We are all sinful people. We all make mistakes, unknowingly, deliberately, accidentally, etc. So we are only going to review the thoughts/actions of Gehazi for instruction purposes. That's one of the reasons that God wanted this account recorded for all time: to learn something from it: **We know:**

#1 - Naaman, a man who did not know the GOD of Israel, was an honorable man. So much so that in battle, GOD brought victory THROUGH him. He obviously was a man of honor at home too, because this young unnamed captive girl cared about his wellbeing enough to speak up for him! He certainly showed his humble nature by turning his company around to go back to thank and offer gifts to Elisha. **Then** he makes a **SACRED** commitment to honor only the GOD of Israel. He asks to bring back dirt and asks pardon for when his job requires that he take his master into the House of Rimmon. **A holy scene with Elisha for sure!**

#2 - We already know that Elisha is a man of GOD. A prophet. A man who is obedient to the God of Israel. A man who gives glory to God! He has a small part in terms of speaking. But what he says is powerful! Things dramatically change – for Better and for WORSE.

#3 - Gehazi, servant of Elisha, (just as Elisha was servant of Elijah), a man who called Elisha "Father," a man who KNEW the GOD of Israel, **FELL HARD**. Gehazi didn't just fall down a slippery slope...no...he took a **running start** and **JUMPED** off a cliff....and sinned.

And so there would be very huge consequences.

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[REMEMBER..... what we **think** is what we **say**....what we **say** is what we **do**... what we **do** can bless the Lord or lead to our downfall. Gehazi fell hard.]

Gehazi's first 2 sins occurred in his head, v20: He **thought**, then **said the Lord's name**, as if to right a wrong. That's his **running start**. Next, he acts on his thoughts/words! So after he's greeted by an honorable man, (who jumps off his chariot to meet him), Gehazi **jumps off the cliff!!!** His lies continue, in deed **and** implication, **multiple times**. He knew better, but says: **(a) His master sent him!** **(b) And tells a false story!! (After twice saying he'd take no gifts, would Elisha have changed his mind, ever?)**

(c) But, Gehazi implied that his master, (who serves the God of Israel), **changed his mind** and **needs** to accept gifts. **WHAT?!?!?** That is **THE JUMP!** In speaking that, he dirtied Elisha's reputation **and ALSO diminished the holiness of the God of Israel**. **Wonder** what Naaman thought about Elisha **needing** the gifts? **Wonder** what the whole company, especially the 2 servants who carried the gifts back to Gehazi's house thought? **Wonder** what rumors would fly around when they all arrived back home and told how Elisha **changed his mind** and took the gifts he originally said 'no' to, twice. **Wonder** what that young unnamed girl would think when she heard that? Maybe she was too young or too happy to contemplate it. Maybe there were no rumors.....maybe Elisha wasn't seen as a man living to **give glory to his God**, but viewed as a man **living the way of the world**. ☹

But the GOD OF ISRAEL is not the way of the world. Indeed, Elisha said he was there 'in spirit' during that whole awful exchange between Gehazi and Naaman. Elisha clearly saw this as a great blemish Gehazi cast upon the **holiness of the time when Naaman accepted the God of Israel**.

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Philippians 4:8 records Paul telling us to keep our minds on things that are 'right and just and holy.' When we guard our minds, we stop the 'running start' and prevent 'jumping' into sinful action. **NOTE:**

No one punished Gehazi. It was a consequence. Justice for diminishing the God of Israel.

And that's why it became a **visual** reminder for Gehazi's family -- forever.

Our own sins will carry a consequence on those around us, always. Remember that!

From Catherine Robertson:

A PERSONAL WORD: *As this would have been Youth Sunday, it's the last written lesson that I'll be submitting for the bulletin. Sad. But I was honored to serve as your teacher this past year and very sorry that Covid19 abruptly closed our time together and brought such difficulty and sorrow into our world.*



*Especially for those whose loved ones are no longer with them. I continue to pray that you and your families are safe as we walk through the weeks ahead. **You have each blessed me more than you will ever know.** So, I have taken one more opportunity to shower you with the Word of God and have chosen a book for each of you and gave them to Pastor Meredith along with a typed note of explanation. (Books were all quarantined for your safety.) She said she'd get them to you! (Thank you, Meredith!) I did pray over the choices and trust that you will find that the Lord has a special word -- just for you -- in your book. **Our Lord is so amazing!** God bless you all and Thank You for allowing me to walk alongside you for awhile!! I know, despite the current state of our world, God has called you to a future of love and life and hope in Jesus. Such are the praises I joyfully sing for you! **GIVE GOD THE GLORY - ALWAYS!** ~love & prayers, Catherine!*

Blessing of the Tithes, Offerings and Gifts & Communion Offerings:

It is both a responsibility and a privilege to share in God's saving work in our world. As we have each presented our offerings, let us be grateful for the privilege of being partners with our Saving God in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. May the Lord receive our gifts with our thanksgiving and commitment and bless those who have blessed others through their sacrifices. Amen.

(Tithes, offerings, and gifts are greatly appreciated as a means to continue to care for our facilities, the needs of each other, and our local and worldwide community. We thank you for your pledges at this time and ask that you Please Pray over your gifts and mail them to the church at [1400 John Fitch Hwy, Fitchburg MA 01420](#)).

Doxology:

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost.*

Sermon Text: Acts 3:1-10

"One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."

"Helping Hands"

I read this scripture and wonder, especially with so much in the news, what the man in this passage was feeling. Have you ever felt stuck, or helpless? Have you ever felt weary, beloved? So weary that you barely feel like you are in the room, as if you were sitting in the middle of a stage where a play was being performed night after night, but you were not part of it? I wonder if that is how the disabled person here felt as he waited day after day for enough to get him through another day after day. How could he know that he was someone special? How

could he possibly be aware that he was going to give something to the people of the city that they would never forget; something that would change his life and the lives of others. He was just moments away from learning that when he had almost nothing left to give, if he would give it to Jesus, God's hands would be big enough to hold his problem, and even mold it into something new and wonderful.

People had been giving this lame man a helping hand all his life. At this point in his life, others were being helpful in bringing him to a place where the people needed to go in order to offer the ninth hour prayer. Why would Peter and John feel so obliged to give something to the man? Was it sheer kindness? Actually, just about everyone who entered the Temple was well aware of the concept of giving alms to those in need, which was particularly beneficial to someone in his state. Most knew of the writings of the book of Tobit, or at least the phrase in it that said,

“For those who act in accordance with truth will prosper in all their activities. To all those who practice righteousness give alms from your possessions, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it. Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the Darkness.

Indeed, almsgiving, for all who practice it, is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High”
(Tobit 4:6-11, NRSVACE).

Giving alms was common practice and this man was so used to handouts that even as he asked for money from passersby, he did not even pay attention anymore to who it was that was giving him support. The answer to all his problems was literally staring him in the face and he was barely cognizant of their presence. The scripture said that Peter and John were looking right at him, and they demanded his attention as they said, “Look at us” (v.4). The two men were determined to give according to what little they had. Just because he didn't hear alms drop, that did not mean that they had nothing to offer him, in fact, when he looked up and paid attention to the two men, he found healing.

That is the first point I want to make today. Sometimes we need a reminder to snap out of our distractions, or the fog in our head and look around. If Peter and John had been busy talking on the way to Temple they may have missed the man sitting there, especially since they did not have any money in their pockets. I know because before I started really paying attention to Jesus, I would walk through a city with no money in my pockets, and when people asked for cash, I would just keep walking while saying a short apology, without wanting to make eye contact with the person asking, because I was broke and felt bad about being no help, or worse because I did not want to give what little I had away.

Peter and John could have just kept walking. What made them stop and look at the man who called out for money, was the compassion of the Holy Spirit in them. They desired to help, and they knew that what that man really needed was not just a few more alms. They saw one in need of healing, and knew the One who heals. They did not give him what he wanted; they gave him something even better. They gave him something so wonderful he would not have dared to ask for it. That man had spent so long by the gate of the Temple at the time of prayer. Had he ever asked anyone to pray that God would heal him?

The Bible does not say, but this is the second point that I hope you remember from this account. Sometimes our problems seem so big that we do not even dare to ask for them to be fixed. Like this man, it does not even occur to us to ask God. We just keep looking for ways to either provide for ourselves, or get our immediate needs met from others. But God is a remarkable giver and our Creator can take what little we have and make it into something wonderful, just like this man's faith.

There are so many examples of this concept throughout scripture. Abraham gave all he had left, his only beloved son Isaac, and God made him the father of a nation with as many children born into his family as the stars in the sky (*Genesis 22:9-18*). His descendants, the Israelites gave up all the security they had left in Egypt and were given all the wealth of that empire, and later the promised land beyond the Jordan river.

At the time of King David's death, he gave everything he had to Solomon for the building and furnishing of the Temple of God, and because of his willingness to give all that he had in life and in death, David's house and his kingdom will endure forever before the Lord and his throne established forever (*II Samuel 7:11-16*). There is only one king David, whom all the world knows, and it is through his family line that Jesus, who even now is seated at the right hand of the Father (*Colossians 3:1*), is descended.

All authority has been placed under King Jesus (*Matthew 28:18*). Even God Himself, gave His Son, His only Beloved Son (*John 3:16*), and in giving Jesus, and in Jesus giving up what little life His body had left on the cross (*Matthew 27:50*), now all, as we read last week, all who call upon Jesus name shall be saved (*Acts 2:21*). God gave Jesus, His very Self, all He had left of righteousness, and we are all made righteous through His sacrifice.

Putting your problems in Jesus' helping hands is always a good idea, as David wrote, "Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved" (*Psalms 55:22*). People cannot always help solve your problems, even with the best of intentions. Only Jesus can be fully relied on for your provision because only He has the power, authority, and wisdom to give you the best care for all involved. In the case of this lame man, it was in the name of Jesus that miraculous provision would be found.

On Flag day, We are all reminded that good soldiers are known for giving of themselves for our sake, and sometimes all they have left, their very lives for our freedom. Others have given of the talents the Lord has bestowed upon them, Like Francis Scott Key for example.

The lyrics of "The Star-Spangled Banner," America's national anthem since 1931, are taken from a patriotic poem written by Francis Scott Key after he witnessed the Battle of Fort McHenry during the War of 1812. Key gave all he had left on that boat in a Baltimore harbor as the sun came up one morning and he saw an American flag sewn by Mary Pickersgill and her daughter, which had been commissioned by Major George Armistead in 1813 for Baltimore's Fort McHenry.

Armistead had asked for the flag to be so large that the British would have no trouble spotting it from a distance. The flag was installed in August 1813, and, a year later, during the *Battle of Baltimore* (*Smithsonian*), it was seen still flying in the dawn's early light as a giant banner of freedom and symbol of hope waving in the morning breeze.

"On a rainy September 13, 1814, British warships sent a downpour of shells and rockets onto Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor, relentlessly pounding the American fort for 25 hours...A week earlier, Francis Scott Key...had boarded the flagship of the British fleet on the Chesapeake Bay in hopes of persuading the British to release a friend who had recently been arrested. Key's tactics were successful, but because he and his companions had gained knowledge of the impending attack on Baltimore, the British did not let them go. They allowed the Americans to return to their own vessel but continued guarding them. Under their scrutiny, Key watched on September 13 as the barrage of Fort McHenry began eight miles away.

"It seemed as though mother earth had opened and was vomiting shot and shell in a sheet of fire and brimstone," Key wrote later. But when darkness arrived, Key saw only red erupting in the night sky. Given the scale of the attack, he was certain the British would win. The hours passed slowly, but in the clearing smoke of "the dawn's early light" on September 14, he saw the American flag—not the British Union Jack—flying over the fort, announcing an American victory" (Lineberry, 2007).

At the end of long night, in what seemed like the last moments of this chapter of the battle, what that poet had left was a bit of paper and ink, and a desire to pen what he saw and felt in that moment, and it was enough for God to use it to bolster what little hope was left in others that they would get through their struggle together and then eventually lead another to set it to the music of "To Anacreon in Heaven," a popular British drinking song, and make his work a piece of art that would be read and sung throughout the years, even this very morning. Yes

indeed, God even worked all those things that happened that night in Baltimore together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

I do not know whether or not Francis Scott Key expected his poem to become epic, but as we who are called children of God wait on Him in expectation, in some way or another, often ways we cannot anticipate, He shows up. The man by the Beautiful gate looked up and expected something from the disciples (v.5). He was not to receive what he expected, they did not have silver or gold coins to offer him (v.6). What they did carry was power and authority in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and as they commanded him to do the impossible, in that Name, he received a most precious treasure; the full use of his legs. He was made whole.

Peter and John showed no surprise by the results of their words. They knew through previous experience with Jesus and a soldier that they needed only say the word and he would be healed (*Matthew 8:8*), and they had also been taught, and believed that as they had been made complete through Jesus, and He is the head over all rule and authority;" (*Colossians 2:10*), so too did they now see the signs manifesting that were promised to those who believe, that in Jesus name they had already spoken in new tongues, they would cast our devils, and they would indeed heal the sick and see them recover (*Mark 16:17-18*), all in what seemed so little, a word spoken in the authority of the Name above all names, the name of Jesus Christ.

So then it may not have seemed strange for Peter to offer the beggar a hand and help him to his feet. Just then they those same feet and ankle bones that had never worked were now made strong and supportive. Just like that, a brief encounter with two people willing to share their faith in the name of Jesus forever changed his walk. He was now a man capable of things that he had never before experienced. He had a new freedom to move in his environment without the need of constant support from the same people on which he had depended in the past. Now he was fully relying on Jesus' mercy and grace.

This brings me to my third point. An encounter with a person in need, in the name of Jesus, as we are acting in compassion and belief, has the potential to forever change their walk in life. Jesus is the best thing you can give to others in their time of need. If the disciples had money to given they may have done that as a way to meet his immediate needs, but they gave instead what little they had, and it was more than any other gift that person had received. Here Christians are encouraged to give Jesus to others, and to open our hands and be a help, in His name, giving all glory and honor to God rather than letting people praise us for sharing what we have received.

The joy that Jesus can bring to people in need is evidenced where it says that the previously lame man was so overjoyed that he was leaping, and praising God, as surely as Isaiah had one prophesied that one day, "the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy" (*Isaiah 35:6*). He was making such a display on the way to the Temple that everyone saw him and "were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him" (v. 10). The same people who had known the man, and lived with him as a fixture in the city now saw the power and compassion of God reflected in the mercy He bestowed upon one of their own.

In this, the man had used what little he had left, just his faith in Jesus in that moment, and it proved to be more than enough for himself and for others, which teaches that faith can be contagious. When people witness what Jesus has done for you, and they witness you reflecting the love of Jesus to others, the effects can change people around you, even others you do not know, in wonderful and lasting ways. It can even save their life.

Today is Flag Day. We have been acknowledging this day, June 14 as a day to remember the American flag for over 100 years. This date based on the event on June 14, 1777, when John Adams spoke about the flag at a meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. He said, "Resolved, that the flag of the thirteen United States shall be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the Union be thirteen stars, white on a blue field, representing a new constellation." (*Adams, 1777*). On May 30, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson issued a presidential proclamation establishing a national flag day on June 14.

As we celebrate Old Glory, we are called to look upon the flag as a witness and reminder of the miraculous things that the Lord has done for this country, and around the world through His children, in His name. On this

Flag Day, we are called to remember all those who have served. People like Desmond Doss, who held onto his faith, not just for himself, but for the sake of others who were in need, who would witness his faith in action at the battle of Hacksaw ridge;

"Desmond Doss was a Seventh-day Adventist who wouldn't touch a weapon or work on the Sabbath. He enlisted in the Army as a combat medic because he believed in the cause, but had vowed not to kill. The Army wanted nothing to do with him. "He just didn't fit into the Army's model of what a good soldier would be," ...A 1940 law allowed conscientious objectors to serve the war effort in "noncombatant" positions, so Doss went with his company as a medic to the Pacific theater. And at Okinawa in the spring of 1945, "Doss' company faced a grueling task: Climb a steep, jagged cliff — sometimes called Hacksaw Ridge — to a plateau where thousands of heavily armed Japanese soldiers were waiting for them... Under a barrage of gunfire and explosions, Doss crawled on the ground from wounded soldier to wounded soldier. He dragged severely injured men to the edge of the ridge, tied a rope around their bodies and lowered them down to other medics below... Doss said: "I was praying the whole time. I just kept praying, 'Lord, please help me get one more.' "

Veteran Carl Bentley, who was also at Hacksaw Ridge, says, "It's as if God had his hand on [Doss'] shoulder. It's the only explanation I can give."

Doss saved 75 men — including his captain, Jack Glover — over a 12-hour period. The same soldiers who had shamed him now praised him. "He was one of the bravest persons alive," Glover says. "And then to have him end up saving my life was the irony of the whole thing." (Blair, 2016).

Desmond did not have a weapon in his hands. He understood that, “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Corinthians 10:4), and fought the enemy with the Word of God, in the name of Jesus. It cost him quite a bit to be criticized and even tormented by both his peers and superiors for refusing to carry a gun. It was his faith in something more powerful that gave him the strength to face his giant without even so much as a stone or sling.

So I ask you, what little do you have left after all the damage and confusion and various types of pain that you have endured? What do you have left in your hands? I would say that the text for today is a good reminder that you have more left within you than you are aware. You have your faith within you, eternal security through the sacrifice of Jesus. You have His Spirit of peace within you as you navigate through your life, whether or not you chose to acknowledge or access that peace. You have it for yourself, and as a gift to others.

God does not love Peter or John more than you. Just as He brought healing and hope to the world through others, He can and desires to do the same for you. In order to allow God to use you, you must first pay attention to the people around you and see, truly acknowledge their need, even when it is hard to look at the suffering of others, perhaps especially then. Secondly, think about the limits that you may have inadvertently placed on the Lord’s goodness and grace.

Are you still holding on to the idea that you have to help yourself, or be more worthy for God to act on your behalf? Perhaps, “You do not have because you do not ask God” (James 4:2b). One of the founders in the Christian faith, James, had much to say about asking and receiving in the 4th chapter of his letter. It is worth a read or review from time to time.

Thirdly, you have been given an amazing opportunity to be an ambassador for Christ. If you will be brave enough in that moment, when His Spirit leads you to speak His name in faith, then amazing transformation has the potential to manifest, sometimes in the moment, and at other times, the other person may need to walk out their issue for a bit before healing takes effect. People can be so quick to share an over the counter remedy in order to offer support or suggestions for healing, yet sharing in the name of Jesus can sometimes get stuck in the throat and hard to say because it is often difficult to know whether or not Jesus will be received.

Good News! You do not have to be enough, not for yourself or anyone else. When you have almost nothing left, give the one whose very name is a picture of open hands, “our refuge and strength, *our* very present help in

trouble' (*Psalm 46:1*), give the people around you help and hope through Jesus Christ, in His mighty name. It is not your place to go around asking every person around you if they need healing or whether or not they know Jesus. It is, however, the role of a disciple of Christ to be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit within you, to acknowledge the place and situation where God has placed you and share the love of Jesus with those around you who are calling out in distress for help. What can you offer them? Ask what you have left. If it be alms, then by all means, but never be fooled into thinking that you have nothing to give. You have the name of Jesus.

Hymn: "Star Spangled Banner" # 688 (Click on link-> <https://youtu.be/YaxGNQE5ZLA>)

Communion Service:

Today, on Flag Day, we will hold an additional Communion service in remembrance of the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, the ultimate Soldier in the army of the Kingdom of God (*John 6:38*), and Commander and Chief of the heavenly army to come (*Rev. 19:12-14*), Christ Jesus.

In the Baptist tradition this is a covenant meal, which we partake of in remembrance of what Jesus has done on the cross for each of us. It is our understanding that all who profess Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior are welcome to share in this meal, which we partake of together, in the presence of the Lord. Before partaking of this remembrance meal, the members of the First Baptist Church of Fitchburg take a moment to read and remember our church covenant, which we proclaim as one body, in one voice united in Christ.

The Church Covenant

May those of us who are members proclaim our church covenant.

"Having been led, as we believe, by the Holy Spirit, to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and upon profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we now enter into Covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We promise, as the Lord shall enable us, to strive daily to love according to the spirit and teachings of Christ, and to do all in our power to create a spiritual atmosphere within the Church, which will lead others to come into fellowship with God and into saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

As a fellowship of Christians, we promise by the help of God to nurture Christian growth in our homes, and to minister to the spiritual and material needs of one another. We further promise to strive for the advancement of our church in worship, in Christian Education, in service, and in fellowship; to observe its ordinances; to attend its services as faithfully as possible; to contribute regularly to its local and missionary enterprises; to unite with some other church when living away; and by personal and group example, to commend the Christian way of life to all.

May the blessing of God our Father, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, and the Holy Spirit our Helper and Guide ever rest upon us." Let us pray.

Communion Prayer:

Almighty God on High, omnipotent King, look down from Your Sanctified Abode, and bless the valiant *who serve You*...who risk their lives to protect the welfare of all Your creation. Benevolent God, be their shelter and fortress, and do not allow them to falter. May harmony dwell in their ranks... Fill their hearts with faith and courage to thwart the evil schemes of our enemies and to abolish every rule of evil. Protect them on land, in the air and in the sea, and destroy their adversaries. Guide them in peace, lead them toward peace, and return them speedily to their families alive and unharmed.

Grant us true peace in fulfillment of the prophecy: "Nation shall not lift up sword against another nation, nor shall they learn war any more." Let all the inhabitants of the world know that Dominion is Yours, and Your name inspires awe upon all that You have created. May this be Your will, and let us say, Amen.

(Prayer adapted from one written by OU/RCA)

The Bread: On the night Jesus was betrayed He, “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

Take, Eat.

The Cup: “In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20).

Take, Drink.

And so we proclaim Jesus, until His return!

After the meal, Jesus and His disciples went out to the mount of olives and sang hymns. Please join me in heart and spirit in singing the first verse of our traditional closing hymn,

Hymn:

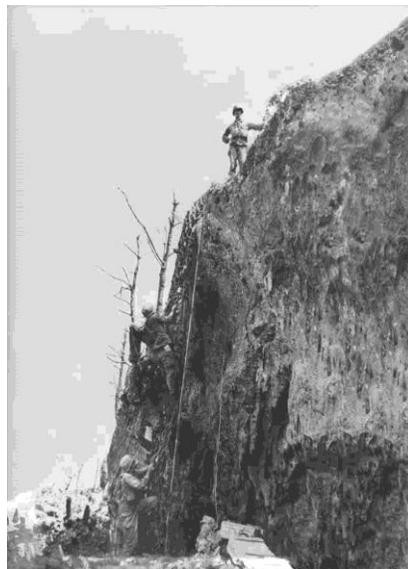
“Blest Be The Tie”

*Blessed be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like that to that above.*

Benediction:

May we go forth remembering that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. I pray that the Lord of the harvest will send each of you as laborers into the fields as you consider God’s call on each of your lives, in the authority of Jesus’ name. Amen.

May the Lord bless and keep you all.



During the battle, Doss (seen here at the top of Hacksaw Ridge) dragged severely injured Men to the edge of the ridge and lowered them down to other medics below.

Courtesy of the Desmond Doss Council

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