

Sermon Title: "Fulfillment"

May 9th, 2021 – 6th Sunday in Easter

Text: John 15:9-17

Theme:

What's in it for me?

Sermon Text:

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I went to Washington DC, I had the opportunity to travel to Arlington National Cemetery, the WWII, Vietnam, and Korean War Memorials. We have a history in this country of honoring those who gave their lives for our country and when you travel to these places, you see that there are a lot of names of people who died. It is very sobering to think that so many gave so much over that period of time.

In the Christian Church, we have a special word for those Christians who die for the faith – martyr. "Martyr," means witness, but following the Decian Persecution, Christians sorted themselves into three categories, the Lapsi (those who lapsed in their faith and worshiped the emperor, those who obtained a certificate by fraudulent means, and the martyrs – those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their faith.

When we read today's Gospel passage, it is easy to think that Jesus wants us to die a martyr's death, just as many in Islam dream of doing. Some of the early church fathers were a little too eager to become martyrs and so the church took a more reasonable stance, don't seek it out, but if it comes, remain faithful. This view has been the predominant view in the Christian Church since that time. So, let's dive into our Gospel Lesson to see what Jesus is really talking about, and as usual context is crucial.

Our Gospel Lesson takes place just before Jesus is arrested and crucified. He is trying to mentally and emotionally prepare the Disciples for Jesus' death and resurrection, as well as their transformation into Apostles. Jesus is trying to tell them that all of the Old Testament can be broken down into two things, loving the Lord, your God with all of your heart, and loving your neighbor as yourself. Notice that love is at the core of both of these commandments. Love is the fulfilling of the law. We must love both God and Man. When Jesus says, *"¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends,"* He is actually talking about what He is going to do for them, namely dying on a Roman



Cross. Notice how Jesus, then elevates the Disciples from servant status to friend status as all of the Fathers' will has been revealed through Jesus. Nothing hidden. It's all there on the table, and on the Cross. God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die, so that we might live.

While it is true that all of the Disciples, except for John and Judas Iscariot, died gruesome martyr's deaths, that's not necessarily what God wanted. Permitting something to happen is quite different and desiring it to happen. These guys died because of the sins of others, but through their deaths, many came to faith. God wanted them to live, and He wanted others to come to faith. Sometimes we have this deep seeded guilt for our sin, and we think that we must make some kind of sacrifice ourselves to atone for our sins. We think that if we die a martyr's death, then we will somehow atone for our sins. Guess what gang, Jesus already died on the Cross and rose so that you may have life abundantly. He loved you enough to do that. When you listen to Jesus and follow Him by loving God and your neighbor, you have life abundantly. Release your guilt. Jesus has.

Am I saying there won't come a time when your faith won't be challenged? Not at all. Our faith has been tested in the past 18 months in ways that usually only happen in other parts of the world. Living with restrictions on worship has been extremely hard. The recent fight I had to fight, just to be able to come to Church and lead worship services was something that I never even dreamed that I would have to do in this country. Our history books are full of your brothers and sisters who paid the ultimate price for their faith. This kind of persecution still goes on today in many parts of the world.

While this pandemic has drug on and never seems to go away, I believe that there is be light at the end of this dark tunnel. I believe that we will once again be able to come together, worship together and have fellowship much like we used to do it. How many of you are looking forward to some kind of potluck or the return of Sunday School? How many of you are looking forward to not look at your neighbor as if he is Covid-19, but as a brother or sister? There are many things I miss from our worship, but I really miss the people. I am so encouraged to see people coming back.

Jesus concludes this passage by reminding the Disciples that they were chosen by Him, not the other way around. We are chosen by Jesus. He has a purpose for each and every one of you. When we love God and love our neighbor, we live the lives that God wanted us to have.

Going back to the memorials and Arlington and reflecting on how many people from many generations gave the ultimate sacrifice, because of an idea, that we can do better. We confess our

shortcomings, and we strive to do better, but we keep falling short. To us Christians, that should sound very familiar. We confess that we are sinful beings who have received forgiveness by grace.

So, should we honor those Christians that have died as martyrs? I think it is appropriate to do so, so long as we do not put them on a pedestal above other Christians. There are no classes of Christians. We are all just brothers and sisters in Christ. Period.

Jesus wants you to live your life. That's why He paid the price for your sins. When you live your life as the Savior intended, you honor His sacrifice. So live your life. Love Jesus. Love your neighbor. Be fulfilled.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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