Text: Matt 10:34-42

**Introduction**

It is the July 4th weekend for where all of us actually live. And there are two big things about that weekend. The signing of the Declaration of Independence. I still love the play 1776, even though you know the ending before the play even starts. John Adams as the central character breaking into “I’m obnoxious and disliked, or haven’t you heard” captures a hard truth. Doing important things usually takes at least one person being willing to question the way things are done and ask for a new way. The other big American thing this weekend is Gettysburg. Limiting it to Gettysburg is East Coast centric history though. US Grant won the battle of Vicksburg on that same day, which arguably was the more important victory, with maybe a bit of foreshadowing of Appomattox. Grant met early in the evening with Confederate General Pemberton to talk terms of surrender. Grant told him unconditional surrender and Pemberton went back to defense of the city. Later in the evening Grant reconsiders, calls him back and offers parole. And Pemberton accepts and hands over the city splitting the Confederacy.

Now we are gathered in Christ’s church today. I would not be doing my job if I paid more attention to the national history than the worship of Jesus. But I think there are some salutary things to take from that history to meditate on the gospel lesson.

**Text**

The biggest of them is to recognize the reality of the situation. That is what John Adams was constantly trying to get the Continental Congress to recognize. It had been over a year since Lexington and Concord. The colonies were already at war. Pretending they weren’t wasn’t going to do anyone any good. Join or Die as the flag said. That play 1776, as the Congress is whittling down the Declaration, has the exclamation, “This is a revolution! We're going to have to offend SOMEbody!”

Jesus reminds the Christian, or at least the ones sent out to preach although I’d favor the larger understanding, “do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” In this world, the Christian is always at war with the devil, the world and our own sinful nature. It doesn’t do anyone any good to imagine that we don’t walk in danger all the way. .Likewise, if you are following Christ, you are going to offend somebody. “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother….” It’s a revolution against the strong man of this world, the world is going to be offended.

The deep question that Jesus is pressing on the 12 as he sends them out, is do you believe you are doing something important? “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is nor worthy of men.” Is this messiah, this revolution, this Word, this proclamation – The Way, The Truth, and They Life. Is Calvary the hill to die on? “Whoever find his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

We are in a war, straight language befits our speech. The world today is all about finding yourself. The top of the pyramid is self-actualization. Follow the World. You will find this life. This life that ends. Whoever finds his life will lose it. Jesus is looking for those who will fight this world. Those who will put God above the things of this world be that father or mother or son or daughter or whatever hill is your Calvary with your cross.

**Christology**

Now why would someone volunteer for the trench warfare of fighting the devil, the world and our sinful nature? Jesus gives us a couple of reasons, or maybe I should say a couple of promises.

The first promise is the promise of anyone who goes out into the world to proclaim the nearer reign of God. “Whoever receives you, receives me, and whoever receives me, receives him who sent me.” This work, this proclamation of the Kingdom is the mission of God. This revolution to throw down the dragon. This war for a new birth of freedom for those enslaved to sin. This is what God is doing in this world. If you wish to draw near to God, this is where he is found. In the proclamation of the forgiveness of sin. In the call to live the new life. And the promise is that whoever does this, whoever puts on the Armor of God and heads to the front, fights right beside Christ and the Father. So close that you don’t know the difference. If they receive you, they receive Christ and the one who sent Him. If you seek God, you’ll find him in this work of living the Christian life.

**Moral**

Now the second promise is simply the reward. In the ancient world, the reward of being a victorious soldier was the spoils. I think its fair to ask what the spoils of this war are? The simple answer is eternal life. “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” But maybe I should have had us confess the Nicene Creed today. The Apostle’s ends with the reward of “the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” The Nicene Creeds ends with “the life of the world to come.” Which recalls Jesus’ promise of the beatitude, “blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” The Christian hope is the resurrection. The last scene in Revelation is the New Jerusalem descending onto the new earth.

But when have you seen a meek soldier? How does one fight in this battle?

“The one who receives a prophet, because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward.” Receiving the prophet is receiving the Word. The World has its own Word and demands that we live according to it. The Prophet is the one who shows up and pronounces that the world is wrong, and corrupt and about to be destroyed. The Prophet is the one who shows up and instead of pronouncing peace, reminds us that we are in the midst of a struggle for our souls. “The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms.” The prophet stands contrary to the world. The one who receives the prophet, and lives contrary to the world according to the Word of God – will receive the prophet’s reward.

“The one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.” The righteous person is the one who has been called by the Holy Spirit to faith in Jesus. The person who has been called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified. We might use the shorthand of the saint. The first battle of the saint is against our own sinful nature. Receiving a righteous person is receiving the example of those who came before in the faith. That Christ has redeemed us and given us his Spirit. And now we are not “under the law but in that New Life of the Spirit.” And that new life is not that we might go on sinning. Heck No. That new life is that we might but to death that sinful nature – and receive the righteous person’s reward.

Follow this through I’d suggest that the cup of cold water is about all we can do against Satan. But Christ has defeated that old snake. One little word can fell him. Steals on the ear the distant triumph song. One cup of cold water. And unlike Dives who begged for a drip of water, but was refused because he never even noticed Lazarus at his gate. Never gave him the scraps his dogs ate. Unlike Dives, the one who gives even a cup of cold water, will never lose his reward.

How is this war fought? It is fought against the devil, the world and our own sinful nature. It is fought with the Word and Sacraments. It is fought thought the fruits of the Spirit.

**Eschatological**

We have the promise today of working alongside God. And we have the promise tomorrow of the eternal reward.

It is in those promises that we find the grace of God. Grant’s first offer at Vicksburg was unconditional surrender which inspired continued fight even when you know it is over. Without God we know that our fight against those enemies is over. It is just a matter of time. We can fight all we want, but without the Spirit we lose. Grant changed his mind and offered grace. And through grace he split the resistance. The Father has given us sinful rebels grace, casting out our accuser and ending putting a clock on his reign.

Lincoln called the sacrifice of Gettysburg the offering for a New Birth of Freedom. He stole it from that cross. That cross was the sacrifice for our new birth of freedom. The freedom to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

And if a New Nation – free of the Tyrant George the Third was worth the revolution. How much more is the Kingdom of Heaven – free of the Tyrant Satan – worth the call of Christ?

We rightly celebrate July 4th, we are Americans. But in the midst of the pomp and fireworks, recognize the eternal truths the celebrate. This nation is not walking with God, nor is it going to give you an eternal reward. But its story, again and again, can point to the one who does.

Be swift my soul to answer Him, be jubilant my feet. Amen.