

Year A, June 25, 2017  
3 Pentecost (Proper 7)  
Christ Church, Mexia

With respect to those who did not attend the University of Texas, but possibly some other school and who may regard it as a rival, please bear with me for a moment. I understand that their slogan is, "What starts here changes the world."

Adm. Wm. McRaven referenced this in his address to the graduating class of 2014. He then shared with the graduates some lessons he had learned that he thought would be helpful to them in changing the world. They were primarily based upon his Navy SEAL training and there are ten in all. But I will not share all of them; his speech is online, if you'd like to watch or read it.

At one point he said: "Every day during training you were challenged with multiple physical events – long runs, long swims, obstacle courses, hours of calisthenics – something designed to test your mettle. Every event had standards – times you had to meet. If you failed to meet those standards your name was posted on a list, and at the end of the day those on the list were invited to a 'circus.' A circus was two hours of additional calisthenics designed to wear you down, to break your spirit, to force you to quit. No one wanted a circus.

A circus meant that for that day you didn't measure up. A circus meant more fatigue – and more fatigue meant that the following day would be more difficult – and more circuses were likely. But at some time during SEAL training, everyone – everyone – made the circus list.

But an interesting thing happened to those who were constantly on the list. Over time those students – who did the extra two hours of calisthenics – got stronger and stronger. The pain of the circuses built inner strength, built physical resiliency.

Life is filled with circuses. You will fail. You will likely fail often. It will be painful. It will be discouraging. At times it will test you to your very core. But if you want to change the world, don't be afraid of circuses."

He also talked about the rigors of setting explosives underwater on a ship, one of the primary missions of a SEAL. He said: "To be successful in your mission, you have to swim under the ship and find the keel – the centerline and the deepest part of the ship. This is your

objective. But the keel is also the darkest part of the ship – where you cannot see your hand in front of your face, where the noise from the ship’s machinery is deafening and where it is easy to get disoriented and fail.

Every SEAL knows that under the keel, at the darkest moment of the mission, is the time when you must be calm, composed – when all your tactical skills, your physical power and all your strength must be brought to bear. If you want to change the world, you must be your very best in the darkest moment.”

The Gospel reading today also contains some “unsettling” things – not unlike the things Adm. McRaven was discussing. We need to remember that in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, Matthew is telling about Jesus calling and preparing his disciples for their mission - to change the world.

In telling them that a student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master, he is essentially telling them that they will be persecuted as he is to be persecuted. Of course, they haven’t quite internalized His fate yet, much less their own. We know what happened to Jesus and ultimately to the Apostles and other Christian martyrs, yet sometimes we don’t want to acknowledge that these words were meant for every Christian, including us.

However, while we should heed the warning, we must not lose sight of the privilege contained in the message. The student benefited from the teacher and the servant from the master. To suffer for Christ is to share the work of Christ. To share in the glory of his victory over death and the benefits it provides, should there not be some small price?

What do we value most, covet the most, something we obtain for free or something for which we spend many dollars? William Barclay would clarify the answers to these questions thus, “...if we know the fellowship of his sufferings, we shall also know the power of his resurrection.”

Still, and this is more true today than ever, we are not big on suffering, or paying the price for things. In this day of “entitlement,” we expect to receive everything gratis, it seems. So although, Jesus clearly tells us not to fear, and assures us that God will care for us even more than the sparrows; and even though Jesus makes it clear

that we must acknowledge Him before men in order for Him to acknowledge us before God, we still find ways to deny Him.

We may deny him with our words... For example, when J.P. Mahaffy, a famous scholar at Trinity College, Dublin and man of the world, was asked if he was a Christian, his answer was: "Yes, but not offensively so." He meant that he did not allow his Christianity to interfere with the company he kept or the worldly pleasure he loved. We may not be so direct, but when we admit to going to this church, but assure people we are no different for it, or act like we don't follow its teachings or let it interfere with our lives, aren't we doing the same, albeit in a more indirect manner?

Of course, we can deny Jesus by our silence. It is easier not to take an unpopular stand or to say nothing about social injustice, than to stand up for what we believe. In fact, most of us probably deny Christ more in this way than by what we do say or do.

And then there are our actions, or perhaps our lack of actions... the failure to render assistance when it is clearly needed, the abuse of our children, the gossip about our neighbor - and we could make an exhausting list here.

The point is that if we call ourselves Christian, we are called to be different than the world - not to conform to the world, but to be transformed out of it; to sow love, not hate; to do good, not evil; to live our lives as examples of our faith and the life of our savior.

Think about the members of the early church for a moment. Pliny, "the younger," wrote to Trajan the Roman emperor that he had given Christians the opportunity to invoke the gods of Rome, to offer wine and frankincense to the image of the emperor, and to curse the name of Jesus. But in the end, he had to admit that those who were truly Christian could not be compelled to comply, despite torture and the threat of a horrible death. Where would our church be today without the loyalty of these people? Where will the church be tomorrow if we fail?

In closing let me share a quote from Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE: "Jesus loves you. If you didn't wake up today with that awareness, Jesus has news for you, good news. God loves you and has big plans for you that span all eternity. In the meantime, where will this good news lead you? I wouldn't know. His invitation to all of us is simply to follow."

Could we change the world? Yes, absolutely, but it won't be easy. Yet we know that God will be with us every step of the way and that the reward is more than worth it!

In the name of the one God the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.  
Amen.