

"Lord, in your name...."

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

July 4, 2004

It is a beautiful holiday weekend - a great time to be out doors - to go camping with family - sitting with our feet up at a lake somewhere. There was a great line in a book entitled, "Life is Like A Dogsled Team . . . If Your Not The Lead Dog, The Scenery Never Changes" that said this: "Ours is the only country in the world where people pay \$200,000 for a house and then leave it for two weeks every summer to sleep in a tent." {Well, that has nothing to do with anything!}

The disciples returned from the little mission trip that Jesus had sent them on and they were excited. They had been sent as forerunners of Jesus who intended to go to those villages some time sone. They had gone with a word about the kingdom of God and with the power of Jesus name. And they were a huge success! Even though the only measure of their success that is mentioned is that fact that demons submitted to them, I suspect that there was a lot more that they experienced. Other places we are told about the disciples healing the sick and performing mighty deeds. We might imagine that people from the surrounding areas might have flocked in to hear them preach [always a measure of great success that we preachers look for]. But whatever it was that they experienced, they were excited and attributed their success to the fact that they did everything in Jesus' name.

"Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us." What a powerful force that name of God is. People all around the world believe in the power of doing what they do 'in the name of God / god'. It is not just Christians that believe this. People from a great many different religions believe that they do what they do in the name of their god. And they believe that if they do what they do in the name of their god, ultimately they will be victorious.

Today, we as a nation celebrate. We mark the birth of our nation and celebrate our freedom and independence. As our founding fathers came to this day in 1776, they wrote and signed a Declaration of Independence that begins by saying this:

The unanimous Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies in Congress, July 4, 1776

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

Twice in the opening of this document there is an 'invoking' of the name of God as justification for the action they were about to take. We are endowed by our Creator with the right to do what we did in forming this nation. It is the Law of Nature and Nature's God that we do what we do. In many circles, over the years we have come to see ourselves as a 'Christian nation' living and acting in His name. For 50 years we have pledged allegiance to a flag that we have said exists "under God" and we have gone so far as to write on our currency the national motto, "In God We Trust". And we have prospered.

"Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us." The disciples were amazed at what happened when they went out by the command and with the authority of Jesus the Christ. When they walked faithfully to the guidance of Christ the power of the enemy fell before them.

I know that many nations / many religious groups claiming to be following the direction of their 'god' do and have done many things that would make us call into question the whole notion of acting in the name of 'god'. Still I believe that the call remains for us - the call on us as individuals and collectively, on us as a nation to do what we do in the name of and by the will of God. But will we? Will we, either individually or as a nation continue to say: "In God We Trust"?

I went to the store one day several years ago and made a purchase. Among the change I received back was a \$20.00 bill that looked a little strange. But I stuck in my wallet and went on my way. The next store I went to I made another purchase and payed for it with that \$20. But as I handed it to the clerk I looked again at the bill and decided that there was something strange about that bill and I asked for it back and began to study it closely. It seemed to be printed wrong. I decided that it must be counterfeit. But I did not want to accept that as a possibility and I just kept on studying it. I compared and studied until finally I figured it out. This \$20.00 bill was printed without "In God We Trust". Now I could go into the whole history of why and when those words were first printed on our currency but the point of the story is that I just did not see that God was missing. The words are so boldly printed on our money but we do not notice. It just slips our mind and our vision that it is in God we trust.

Where will we go from here? The Supreme Court started to struggle with whether or not we should say that we are a nation "Under God". For now we will still say the words. But do we notice?

*There is a man named Alexander Fraser Tytler who lived at the end of the eighteenth century, but his book *The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic* sends a chilling warning today. Tytler found that ancient democracies waned under the selfishness of human hearts. He wrote: "The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence":*

*From bondage to spiritual faith;
from spiritual faith to great courage;
from courage to liberty;
From liberty to abundance;
from abundance to selfishness;
from selfishness to complacency;
from complacency to apathy;
from apathy to dependency;
from dependency back to bondage.*

Are we a nation that is under God? Do we still call upon His name as the one in who we put our trust and whose will we seek to do? There are some very hard questions that we as a nation struggle over surrounding these issues. They are important issues in so many ways. But I want to point to an important word that Jesus spoke to his followers as they found power in invoking our Lord's name as the source of their ministry. Jesus said that it was exciting to see that the enemy flees at the name of Jesus. But - what was most important was that the individual names of those followers was written in the book of life in heaven. That is the place to start with our nation. Have your name written in heaven –

*and then see if you can get another person to join you in the book of life. **AMEN***