

Sunday, February 17, 2013

Welcome – Greg Snow

Call to Worship – *Psalm 95:1-2*

O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

**Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.**

In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

**O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.**

Songs of Praise – *O Worship The King/Our Great God*

Confession of Sin – *Psalm 24:1-4*

We just sang of our eternal God who shows us grace and mercy through his unfailing love. But too often we take God for granted. When we come into the holy presence of God, our own humanity is laid bare. When we stand in the living presence of truth, our own falsehood is revealed. People of God, let us acknowledge our sins and ask our ever-present God to forgive us. Let's pray.

-Silent Prayer-

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;

for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?

**Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.**

Song of Worship – Take My Life

Assurance of Pardon – Acts 13:38/Ephesians 1:7

Through Jesus Christ forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

Song of Worship – Wonderful Merciful Savior

Offering - *America is not dying because of the strength of humanism; it's dying because of the weakness of evangelism!*

We take people to the cross, (but) we don't put them on the cross. Leonard Ravenhill

The 40 Martyrs of Sebaste – (Source: Voice of the Martyrs)

In 320 A.D., Constantine was the Roman Emperor of the West and Licinius Emperor of the East. Constantine pressured Licinius to legalize Christianity in his region, and he conceded. Fearing treason among the troops, Licinius broke his alliance and wished to eliminate Christianity in his territory. He called upon Agricola, one of his men who commanded the forces in the Armenian town of Sebaste (now Sivas, Turkey), to carry out his evil intentions.

Agricola knew of 40 soldiers who were devout Christians and skilled in battle. In an attempt to force them to renounce their faith, Agricola said to the 40 men, “Either offer sacrifice to the gods and earn great honors, or, in the event of your disobedience, be stripped of your military rank and fall into disgrace.” The soldiers were beaten and thrown into prison to think about what Agricola had said. They encouraged themselves that night by singing psalms and praying.

The next morning Agricola tried to persuade them with flattery, praising them for their valor and good looks. However, the 40 were resolved, unwilling to fall prey to Agricola's empty words and were again chained in the dungeons to await the arrival of an official. While the soldiers waited, they prepared themselves for martyrdom. The next day Lysias, commander of the 12th Legion, arrived and commanded the 40 soldiers to turn from their Christian beliefs or they would have to pay a sharp penalty. The 40 soldiers answered Lysias with respectful defiance, which angered Lysias even more.

At that moment, Lysias ordered the Roman soldiers to take the 40 Christian soldiers into a mountainous region. It was the month of March and wintertime, and the small lake in the area was completely frozen over. The captain of the guard said, ‘Here is one more opportunity for you to deny Jesus Christ – or we will place you on that lake all night until your bodies freeze.’ The brave believers replied, “It is better to freeze for a night than to burn in hell for eternity.” So the 40 believers took off their clothes and stood naked on the ice. With teeth chattering and knees knocking, they sang, ‘40 Brave Soldiers for Christ’ as the Romans looked on and mocked them. Occasionally, the captain would call out, ‘Come to your senses, men. Deny Jesus just for a moment. Come and be warmed by the fire and be saved.’ But the believers would not budge, and they kept singing ‘40 Brave Soldiers for Christ, 40 Brave Soldiers for Christ’.

After a while, one of the 40 brave soldiers was unable to endure the pain any longer. He ran towards the soldiers, saying, 'I deny Jesus the Christ.' Even though their brother had denied Christ, the other brave soldiers still sang, only they changed their song to, "39 Brave Soldiers for Christ'. One of the Roman soldiers observing this scene was so moved that he stripped off his clothes, ran out upon the lake and said, 'No, 40 Brave soldiers for Christ. 40 Brave Soldiers for Christ.'

One version of the story says that all of the men were frozen to death by morning. However, another account says the men still showed signs of life the next morning, and were taken back to the prison where their bodies were burned and their ashes were cast into the river. Either way, the 40 brave soldiers died making a stand for Jesus Christ.

What about us? What would happen if suddenly we were absolutely forbidden to follow Jesus Christ? Would you be willing to suffer, to be tortured, to die? Matthew 10:39 says "*He that finds his life shall lose it and he that loses his life for My sake shall find it.*"

Hear the words of a hymn written in 1832 by Cesar Malan...

It is not death to die
To leave this weary road
And join the saints who dwell on high
Who've found their home with God
It is not death to close
The eyes long dimmed by tears
And wake in joy before Your throne
Delivered from our fears

Only true Christians can sing "it is not death to die." Is that your song? Can you truly sing those words? I invite you to take the next few moments in silent prayer to search your heart. Our prayer is that you will be able to stand for Christ like the 40 brave soldiers did and declare that it truly is not death to die. Let's pray.

Songs of Worship – *It Is Not Death To Die/It Is Well*

Message – *"The Challenges of Ministry"*

Scripture Reference: Matthew 10:16-25

Time of Prayer

Song of Worship – *I Am Thine, O Lord*

Benediction