

*Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church, Naples, FL*

*In God is Our Trust*

Text: Mark 6:1-6

Preacher: Edward Bellis

Date: July 5, 2009 (Independence Sermon)

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One of my favorite songs came out of the Revolution. We know the words of the song and that word matched with its song brings tears to my eyes when I hear them. For all night long the British ships' guns pounded the shoreline. But morning broke and Francis Scott Key looked out his window in his cell onboard the ship where he was held prisoner and saw "by dawn's early light the star-spangled banner yet waving." Those words are now our national anthem.

But how many of us know this poem consists of at least four stanzas. Near the end of this wonderful poem are these lines, "Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just. And this is our motto. In God is our trust." When we celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and what the day represents, we remember the faith of the men and women who launched this free land. We also remember that wasn't the only faith in this country. We remember that the idea of freedom is not universally shared, then or now. For our freedom as citizens of this great nation was bought with a terrible and wonderful price. For not all believe or will believe in the cause of freedom.

Jesus knew what it was like to face trouble from within his country, particularly in his hometown. Jesus also knew how it felt to be frustrated by people's lack of faith. On the Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples gathered in Nazareth where he taught in the synagogue. His friends and neighbors say, "Isn't this Jesus, the carpenter who is teaching? Isn't he the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and Judah and Simon? Aren't these his sisters here with us?" And Jesus' response is telling for he says, "A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own family."

Listen again to verse 5 and 6: "And (Jesus) could do no mighty work, save that he laid hands upon a few sick folk and healed them. And (Jesus) marveled because of their unbelief." Jesus, our Lord and our God, could do no mighty work when people did not believe! In order for us to see the miracle of God our first step is to believe. For if we do not believe, then we will not achieve anything. And Jesus marvels and is frustrated by those who had no faith.

I read somewhere: "the farthest distance we travel in this world is between our head and our heart." In our culture, studies show that nearly everybody believes intellectually that there is a God. Yet, seventy percent of our nation will not be in church. And why not? We are surrounded by evidence of God: the beaches and the green flash, the birth of little babies, and life giving rain. These natural occurrences point us beyond ourselves and into the mystery. So much so that very few people will deny the existence of such a God. This denial comes from the distance between head and heart. For that is where faith lies.

Years ago a party of visitors at the national mint were told by a workman in the smelting works that if you first dipped your hand in water, a ladle of molten metal might be poured over the palm of the hand without burning it.

A husband and wife were part of this party of visitors. "Perhaps you would like to try it," the workman said to the husband.

The husband drew back sharply, "No, thanks," he said, "I'll take your word for it."

The workman turned to the wife, "Perhaps you would like to try it."

She replied, "Certainly." She pulled up the sleeve of her blouse and thrust her hand into a bucket of water. Calmly she held her hand out while the hot metal was poured over it. The wife was willing to take the kind of risk that faith in Christ demands.

Jesus wants us to entrust our lives to him. Jesus wants us to believe with our heads and our hearts. Do we trust in him through all things? Paul's gives us encouragement: "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." That isn't one thing, nor some things. Paul's words are clear, "all things" mean all things... everything. Our finances, our family, our houses, our travel, our work, and our lives belong to a generous God who is working out a purpose. Those words and their depth are hard to accept.

Friends, God really is alive and able to relieve us of our burdens. We are people of faith and hope – both of our head and heart! This Independence Sunday, we celebrate not only our freedom as a nation, but our freedom that we have in our faith in Christ.

Our faith will move us forward from the hills of Montreat and Presbyterian College, Vacation Church School, Habitat for Humanity, St. Matthew's house, Stevens Ministry, mission in Immokalee, our wonderful choirs, and so much more that we do in the name of Christ. And our faith demands that we plunge our lives into the clear water of our baptism so that no matter what the world might pour out on us we are sealed into God's purpose and plan. Our faith is real and is a dynamic interaction with God's will and purpose. We are the body of Christ living with a positive expectation regardless of our circumstances. Jesus is alive. Through our faith in Him, we live joyfully, abundantly, and fruitfully as we place our trust in Him. Through our faith, we look out the portals of our lives and see the banner of Christ on the shore of eternity waving and we repeat the words of Francis Scott Key: "In God is Our Trust."

Today, we celebrate communion in a unique way called intinction. This way of coming to the table demands something from you. In your action, you are coming forward in faith. And your coming forward reminds you and says to this community and to the world that "... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For (we are) convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."