

1 Every generation has its own set of heroes, and regardless of your convictions about warfare, it's undeniable that World War II saw many acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. Consider this story about one such hero:

[Butch] was a fighter pilot assigned to an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific. One day, ..he looked at his fuel gauge and realized that someone had forgotten to top off his fuel tank. He would not have enough fuel to complete his mission and get back to his ship...Reluctantly he dropped out of formation and headed back to the fleet. As he was returning..., he saw something that turned his blood cold. A squadron of Japanese Zeroes were speeding their way toward the American fleet. The American fighters were gone on a sortie and the fleet was all but defenseless. He couldn't reach his squadron and bring them back in time to save the fleet. Nor, could he warn the fleet of the approaching danger... Laying aside all thoughts of personal safety, he dove into the formation of Japanese planes. Wing-mounted 50 caliber's blazed as he charged in, attacking one surprised enemy plane and then another. Butch weaved in and out of the now broken formation and fired at as many planes as possible until finally all his ammunition was spent. Undaunted, he continued the assault. He dove at the Zeroes, trying to at least clip off a wing or tail, in hopes of damaging as many enemy planes as possible and rendering them unfit to fly. He was desperate to do anything he could to keep them from reaching the American ships. Finally, the exasperated Japanese squadron took off in another direction.

Deeply relieved, [Butch] and his tattered fighter limped back to the carrier. The film from the camera mounted on his plane told the tale. It showed the extent of his daring attempt to protect his fleet. [Butch O'Hare] was recognized as a hero and given one of the nation's highest military honors. And today, O'Hare Airport in Chicago is named in tribute to [his] courage.¹

Today we're continuing our Lenten journey of asking ourselves faith questions. Following Jesus requires courage, both in the actions we take (or refrain from taking) and in the questions we honestly ask ourselves. "Following" Jesus implies movement, and

¹ <http://www.inspirationalarchive.com/815/butch-and-eddy/>

movement implies change, something that seldom happens without deliberate and regular reflection on our walk with Jesus. If you haven't yet received one of these mirror cards, be sure to pick one up in the lobby. Let this mirror, or any other mirror you peer into this Lenten season, be a reminder to you to intentionally reflect on your walk with God. Let the mirrors in your life guide you into a closer walk with Jesus, preparing your heart for Easter.

2 Our question for reflection today is "Can I follow where Jesus goes?" Those of you who have been reading the Surprise the World book along with me this Lent know that one of the habits of highly missional people is to learn the stories of Jesus so well that we can't help but bring them into our everyday lives. Spend time reading any of the Gospels, and you'll notice how often Jesus leads his followers into situations that are surprising, uncomfortable, or dangerous. That's just a natural consequence of being on a mission to upend the prevailing social order, to bring about a new kingdom where the first become last, and the last become first. The photograph on this slide is one I took in the outskirts of Jerusalem, a city that has always been marked by military and religious division. To me, this barbed wire symbolizes the danger that Jesus intentionally walked into when he went up to Jerusalem, offering his life to atone for our sins. It's crucial that we remember that just as Jesus didn't enter Jerusalem alone, all of us are meant to take our own journeys of self-sacrifice.

In our earlier reading, the disciples experienced a kind of existential whiplash. Two verses earlier in the Gospel of Mark, Peter professed that Jesus was the Messiah, only to be told quite bluntly by Jesus that the Messiah would be setting up his kingdom, not by raising an army, but by allowing himself to be crucified. As if that wasn't enough, Jesus delivered the disappointing news that serving in the court of King Jesus wouldn't mean a life of political power and wealth for the disciples. In fact, it's not the high road at all that Jesus had in mind for himself or his followers, but the low road, the road of self-denial and self-sacrifice. We're rejoining the disciples now as recorded in the Gospel of John, as the reality of the imminent danger of following Jesus is made even more immediate to them. I'm reading from chapter 11, the first 16 verses.

{Read John 11:-16, The Message}.

3 “Follow me.” Two words with so much meaning. Do you suppose that when Peter and Andrew dropped their fishing nets and began to follow Jesus, they had the slightest clue that they would be following him to a violent death in Jerusalem? Of course not! When Jesus said to Matthew at his tax booth, “Follow me,” what kind of mental map did Matthew have for where this all would lead? Follow me. Two words that call us to a present attitude and often present actions, but also two words that demand we consider our future. Can I follow where Jesus goes? I can’t possibly answer that without understanding where Jesus is going.

Every now and then I think of how amazing it would have been to sit face to face with Jesus during those three years of his ministry, witnessing first-hand the miracles, hearing first-hand the perplexing parables and their explanations. When I have those kind of daydreams, I sometimes selectively edit what I know about the Gospels. I delete the angry mobs, the anxious and often dim-witted disciples, and most of all, that journey to Jerusalem that ended in crucifixion. I think it would be a good idea for each of us to ask ourselves, “Which Jesus am I following?” Am I following the Jesus who welcomed the little children and healed the sick? Am I following the Jesus who shared meals with the undesirables, people we probably wouldn’t have enjoyed spending time with? Am I following the Jesus who angrily turned over the tables of the money changers in the Temple? Am I following the Jesus who was beaten and nailed to a cross? The Jesus we meet in the Gospels is a complex character, and if we really do want to follow him where he goes, we have to “learn Christ,” going to school on the full history, motives, and teachings of the one we call “Lord.” “Follow me” is what Jesus did and still does say to us. Whether we can follow where Jesus goes is a complicated question.

4 The good news is that Jesus knows our limits, just as he knew the limits of his disciples and the crowds who followed him, hoping for another meal of bread and fish. I see it as a sign of God’s great mercy that we don’t know everything that’s in store for us in the future, that we can’t see every cross that waits for us on the horizon.

We can also take great solace in knowing that there is no suffering that we endure for the sake of Jesus that can’t and won’t be redeemed by God. And the greatest sign of that redemption is that the journey to the cross for Jesus ended not in crucifixion, but in resurrection. Even on this side of Easter, we cling to the promise that the resurrection of

Jesus heralds our own resurrections, both in the present life and ultimately in the eternal life to come.

5 I have one more story for you of redemptive hope that came through a courageous sacrifice:

Al Capone...was...notorious for enmeshing the city [of Chicago]...in everything from bootlegged booze and prostitution to murder. Easy Eddie was Capone's lawyer... [H]is skill at legal maneuvering kept Big Al out of jail for a long time. To show his appreciation, Capone paid him very well... [H]e and his family occupied a fenced-in mansion with live-in help and all of the conveniences of the day. The estate was so large that it filled an entire Chicago city block. Yes, Eddie lived the high life of the Chicago mob and gave little consideration to the atrocity[ies] that went on around him.

Eddy did have one soft spot, however. He had a son that he loved dearly. Eddy saw to it that his young son had the best of everything; clothes, cars, and a good education. Nothing was withheld. Price was no object. And, despite his involvement with organized crime, Eddie even tried to teach him right from wrong...He wanted him to be a better man than he was. Yet, with all his wealth and influence, there were two things that Eddie couldn't give his son...: a good name and a good example.

One day, Easy Eddie reached a difficult decision...He would go to the authorities and tell the truth about Scar-face Al Capone. He would try to clean up his tarnished name and offer his son some semblance of integrity. To do this he must testify against The Mob, and he knew that the cost would be great... So, he testified. Within the year, Easy Eddie's life ended in a blaze of gunfire on a lonely Chicago street. He had given his son the greatest gift he had to offer at the greatest price he would ever pay.²

Why am I telling you this story? Because I left out the name of Easy Eddie's son: Butch O'Hare, the fighter pilot who heroically risked his life for the sake of so many others. Just as Eddie's sacrifice was redeemed in Butch O'Hare's heroism, so too can the Lord of Life redeem the sacrifices we make when we choose to follow Jesus, wherever he leads us.

² <http://www.inspirationalarchive.com/815/butch-and-eddy/>



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...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!

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