

Do you hate doing something that has no real meaning or purpose? Do you hate being at a meeting where nothing gets done, where people say the same things over and over again? Welcome to the club. We don't like to waste our time. We don't like to do things that don't amount to anything. I get the impression that Jesus first disciples were just like that. They didn't want to just go through life without doing something significant, so they left everything to follow Jesus. They were willing to put their lives on the line to help Jesus make the world a better place.

Think about those disciples for a minute. They were real men. Peter, James, John and Andrew were fishermen. They had their own business. James and John were ambitious. They asked Jesus for the top two spots in His kingdom. Simon the Zealot was a patriot, someone willing to fight for the freedom of his nation. Both Andrew and Thomas were skeptical, men who had to see for themselves. They were men who answered Jesus' call, a call to total commitment. Jesus said, **“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.”** (verse 34) And that is exactly what they did. They followed Jesus for three years. Then they were Jesus' personal representative in the world after His death and Resurrection. They literally put their lives on the line for the Lord.

This Memorial Day weekend we remember the men and women who put their lives on the line for our nation, for the freedoms we are share and enjoy. **(Video Clip – Memorial Day)** We thank God for these people. And we thank God for the nation we have today because of the sacrifice they made in the past. They gave their all, a very significant sacrifice.

Disciples of Jesus are people who are called to a new life, a significant life, a life of purpose. We are called to take a risk and follow the Lord. Too many people want to play it safe. They don't want to make a commitment. They don't want to stick their necks out to far. They want to settle for armchair discipleship instead of going for extreme discipleship. But Jesus warns us that playing it safe is risky business. Jesus said, **“If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. ... If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”** (verses 35, 38)

God took the biggest risk of all when he created us and gave us the freedom to reject Him or follow Him. We know what happened. So God took another risk by sending His Son into our world, sending Him to the cross to die in our place. Sometime we're afraid to take a risk because we think our God is too small. But Jesus was big enough to shoulder the cross, big enough to pay the price for our sins, big enough to break open the tomb, big enough to rise again.

Jesus didn't play around with sin and death. He played to win. Jesus doesn't want us to play it safe in life. He wants us to play to win. And He makes it possible for us to be winners in Him. After all, He chose us. Jesus said, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.”** (John 15:16) Jesus doesn't force us to follow Him. We still have free will. Too many people want to follow from a distance. But that doesn't work. Following Jesus is hard work. Following Jesus, leading others to know Jesus, makes our lives significant. Serving others and helping them gives our lives purpose.

But not only does God choose us, He also empowers us. He gives us the Holy Spirit to transform our lives. He gives us the Holy Spirit to help us when times get tough. He gives us the Holy Spirit as an endless power supply. But that is not all. God also gives us each other. We are called to follow Christ, but we are not called to walk the path alone. Jesus called 12 disciples, not one. One person does not make a church. But a group of people, walking together in faith, helping and encouraging one another, following Jesus makes a church.

You may be thinking to yourselves, that is true, but these are tough times. The disciples didn't have it easy, either. Tough times are God given opportunities for us to reach out to the people around us, because they are going through tough times too. They need God's help to get through them. We have the perfect opportunity if we are really Jesus' disciples, because we have the hope that they people around us need. Jesus Christ is the hope of the world.

Most of you received a letter in the mail this week asking you to do three things.

1. Pray for our church.
2. Make a financial commitment to the church so that we can set our budget; make our plans for the new fiscal year.
3. Make a service commitment to the Lord, a commitment to significantly use your time and ability to the glory of God and in His service.

We plan to collect these commitments next week. We need your help because we are all in this together. Following Jesus means offering our time, talents and financial resources in His service.

It is important that we work together to grow God's Kingdom. It is important that we reach out to the people around us with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Do you believe in Heaven and Hell? Do you believe that people die every day without hearing about Christ or making a commitment to Him? Then you know that it is both urgent and significant that we tell others about Christ.

Be a true follower of Christ, one who not only follows but invites others to walk with you. It is the most meaningful, the most significant, the most lasting thing you will ever do. Amen.