

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

July 4, 2010

Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: The World's True Super Power

Galatians 6: 7-16, Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

On the 234th anniversary of the birth of this nation, I suspect that there will be picnics and fireworks, legal and illegal, everywhere one can see today. When I was growing up, the Fourth of July was a big family reunion day for the Garrards in the Pittsburgh area. We would gather at my Aunt Peaches and Uncle Leo's who had lots of land. We would play softball, volley ball, swing on the swings, swap stories and recipes, take hikes, eat the finest of picnic food until we were near bursting, and then as dark settled in, the sparklers would come out. It was and still is a day to freely and joyfully celebrate the freedoms we have in a nation that is often called a superpower.

One of the rights guaranteed in our constitution is the freedom to worship as we choose without the government telling us how to worship. Thankfully, there were a lot of Presbyterians involved in making this a right. Since this Fourth of July falls on the Lord's Day, we are exercising our right to worship as we believe God has called us to do. We are here to freely and fully focus on God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and worship him, only. We are also here to celebrate and worship God for a variety of other reasons. One reason is that he alone is "The World's True Super Power." We are reminded of this in several ways in today's scripture lessons.

One reminder comes at the end of the passage in Luke. Jesus told the mission workers, "... do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Now **this** is a reason for a celebration and fireworks! Yes, on this Fourth of July Lord's Day we can celebrate what God, the World's True Super Power has done for us—written our names in heaven!

It is very important to know where our names are written. On a visit to New York City, it was a joy to find my mother's parent's names written in the books at Ellis Island when they came over from Scotland in 1916. Their names are listed in the court house in Toledo, Ohio where they became citizens. I imagine others of you have had similar fun experiences in finding family names. Our names are listed as citizens of this land most likely from the day we are born. Being listed as a citizen of this country is a great privilege, yet, to have our names written in heaven by God is divine.

It has taken a superpower to get our names written in heaven. It took God coming to earth in Jesus to begin overcoming the power evil has on this world. As Jesus said in Luke after the mission workers returned to report to him, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." It took Jesus dying on the cross to finish the fight with the demonic power of evil and save us from our sins. This is one of the reasons Paul wrote, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." It took this kind of super power, this grace of God in Jesus Christ to make it possible for our names to be listed in heaven. It takes the super power of the Holy Spirit to gift us with faith in Jesus Christ; to convince us to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and to

pledge our allegiance to him alone to seal the fact that our names are written in heaven. When God takes me to heaven, I hope to find my Scots grandparent's names, Thomas and Mary Griffin written there as well as the rest of my family, all of you and the rest of my fellow human beings in this world, too. As we look at human history, nations, great and small, who have recorded the names of their citizens, have come and gone, but heaven, where our names are written, is forever, thanks to "The World's True Super Power."

However, God does not want us to just sit and bask in the glory of what he has done in Jesus Christ to inscribe a place in heaven for us. He expects us to positively respond in a responsible manner to this great gift. It is like the rights we have in the U.S. Constitution. It is not enough to just recite them or list them in court houses or in history books. We must practice them with a wise use of time, energy and equality for all to make them work as intended. Likewise, concerning the right to worship, it is meaningless to declare on our money, "In God We Trust," or in the pledge of allegiance we are "One Nation Under God," or make the questionable claim we are a "Christian Nation," or sing of how God shed his grace on America, crowned our good with brotherhood, "From sea to shining sea!:" Unless we truly do trust in God, really submit to the Lordship of God and behave as the Christians Jesus has called us to be by sharing his grace in true brotherhood and sisterhood. (O Beautiful For Spacious Skies). To paraphrase and quote Paul, We should not "be deceived" by empty slogans that declare loyalty to God; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow." If you sow to your own flesh," to your own glory or empty words, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all..." God does not want us to just sit and bask in the glory of what he has done in Jesus Christ to inscribe a place in heaven for us. He expects us to positively respond in a responsible manner to this great gift.

Jesus set the example of how we are to respond to this great gift. He called his followers to his mission to spread the good news that God's kingdom has come. He taught them how to share the message. As redeemed and inscribed citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we too have been called to be his workers in the field. Our community, nation and world are very large fields to cover to teach and practice God in Jesus Christ as "The World's True Super Power." Finding enough willing and qualified workers can be a problem today, just as it was in the first century A.D. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." When a new associate pastor comes on board, he or she will be asking for our help to reach out to the community by leading small groups who minister to young adults, young married couples and single people of all ages. If there is going to be any harvest for the Lord, God needs us to be his workers.

But, I am getting ahead of myself here. First, we must do what Jesus did, pray, "...therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Without the power of the super power, and his calling the right laborers, we will fail. However, Christ will not fail, for by the power of God, as he did with his first century

mission workers, he will keep calling out people and going door to door to proclaim his salvation and to give healing and release from demonic illnesses and powers. He keeps on causing Satan and his power to fail time after time. If we are wise, we too will be praying to be called by God to serve him and no one nor anything else. We must pray for many to respond in a positive way to Christ's call to the mission fields.

It will not be easy mission work, for too many in our community, nation and world prefer that Christians just go away or they consider us irrelevant. In some places today, Christians are persecuted or killed for confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus knew of these dangers for he said, "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." Paul spoke of such threats from false teachers in Galatians. But, if God calls us to work for him, he is with us despite how hard the mission might be.

You see, we are the seed or message planters, and the collectors of the "grain harvest"—inviters of people to Christ and into the church. God in Jesus Christ is the nurturer. He is the one who supplies the written word to teach people. It is his Spirit that moves people to become the new creation in Christ as Paul declared he had become. It is Christ's love that matures each new creation. We simply need to be there in support of this process. Any successes we have are not our own, but are God's. Again, as with Paul, "May we never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to us, and us to the world." This mission work is not of our own mind, spirit and power, it is of God, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. We are the seed or message planters, and the collectors of the "grain harvest"—inviters of people to Christ and into the church. God in Jesus Christ is the nurturer.

As the seventy workers of Jesus' day learned, and we already know, along with the power and support of God, it takes time, careful planning, and sacrifice. It takes knowing your audience, and living amongst them. It takes living out the fruits of the Spirit listed by Paul that Roger spoke so well of last week, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit." There is no law in the Bible, or less importantly, law of any country against such things. All of this is true for today's mission work. It is what God, "The World's True Super Power," has called and gifted us to do.

What do the results this mission of God in Jesus Christ look like? Well it began for Christians nearly 2000 years ago with Jesus and twelve men. Now it includes billions of women, children, and youth as well as men. In 1869, it began with seven men and women in Cheyenne who heard God's call to the mission field and wanted to start a Presbyterian Church. Over the past 141 years, around 12,000 members have confessed their faith in Jesus Christ through this church, and this is only the Presbyterian version of Christianity here. Only Christ knows how many thousands have confessed him Lord and Savior through other Christian churches in this city. Our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches have seen the largest harvest.

Concerning the larger world mission field, in the early 1970's, I met a recently retired Presbyterian mission worker who served 40 years in the African country of the Cameroon. She experienced only one convert in that time. Within three years of her

retirement, there was a Fourth of July like explosion of conversions, three million citizens of that country confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and joined the Presbyterian Church. The new mission workers there credited that saintly woman with planting lots of good seeds that God caused to grow in his time. There are more Presbyterians there than in this country. Now we need to do more planting and harvesting in this 234 year-old nation. This is just a tiny snapshot of the results of God, The World's True Super Power's mission work—again, work he calls us to continue and to take up in new ways in the name of Jesus Christ.

On this Lord's Day, which happens to fall on the Fourth of July with all its picnics and fireworks, God, "The World's True Super Power" has invited us to a meal, a sacred picnic made possible by his mission on earth in Jesus Christ and his death upon the cross. By his grace shed upon us, he has made a brotherhood and sisterhood that indeed stretches from sea to sea that is invited to his table to eat with him, worship him, remember him and then go out into the world in his name to teach the good news and baptize in his name. May the fireworks of the Holy Spirit and the call of Christ to his mission explode in our hearts, minds and souls as we eat the bread and drink the cup on this Lord's Day which happens to fall on the Fourth of July.