

There will my Servant be.

John 12:20-33

According to news reports, Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second, he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean Chippie's cage with a vacuum cleaner.

She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up.

She'd barely said "hello" when "ssssopp!" Chippie got sucked in. The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag.

There was Chippie ... still alive, but somewhat stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water.

Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do ... she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

A few days after the trauma, Chippie's owner was asked how the bird was doing. "*Well,*" she replied, "*Chippie doesn't sing much anymore ... he just sits and stares.*"

It's hard not to see why, I suppose. Being sucked in, washed up, and blown over is not something chippie (if given the choice) would have signed up for in the first place. And after experiencing it once, it's not something, he'd likely want to experience again.

It's far easier to stay on one's perch – far from the threat. It's far safer to stay high on one's perch, safe in one's cage – calmly living out one's days in safety and security.

Most of us are that way – are we not?

While we may (well) have had our own "*chippie-like*" experiences, we don't go out of our way to find them – and we would very much prefer if they didn't find us!

If you are at all like me, it's not that we are against some degree of excitement in our life – but within reason. To a certain degree. Within certain parameters.

A while back there was a TV show called "*Fear Factor*." If you recall, it was a show where contestants would try to out-do one another through a number of fear-filled and/or disgusting activities. (Like eating something slimy and repulsive, or defying gravity in some frightening way, or being required to escape from a locked underwater cage – that sort of thing)

I would never have been a contestant! Ever!

No, I like what I like; I like what I am comfortable with.

I like the relative safety of a certain spectrum of activities and situations and get uncomfortable (rather quickly) at anything that falls outside of that. I like to play it safe – mostly!

Most of us tend to be that way – I think!

We like to play it safe, we don't take too many chances. We try to avoid things that frighten us, or make us uncomfortable, or uneasy, or unsettled, or dangerous, or that opens the door to possible harm.

And, if you are like me, you have a real sense of respect for those who **are** willing to take those challenges and accept those risks.

I recall my wife and I had been in Trail (where we live) for just over a year, when I had the opportunity to become Chaplain to the local militia unit. Since our arrival in Trail, my wife and I had been looking for opportunities to reach out in some way into our community ... (something outside our church) – and this seemed to fit the bill.

And so for the last 23 years or so, I have been my congregations missionary to a group of people our congregation would likely have very little connection to. Their support for *me* has become part of *their* ministry to the community.

One of the things that drew me to military chaplaincy was that I was introduced to a group of people – young people mostly – who were willing to take that risk, willing to face that challenge. Those, whose love of country (and what it stood for), was such that they were willing to step up, and step out and open the door to the possibility harm – in order to protect that which they loved and held dear. Who were willing to “*stand on guard*” (at is were) to the peace and freedom we all enjoy.

And it has always struck me that if there was any group that needs to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ more, it's men and women such as these – who are putting their lives on the line for others.

Everyone needs to hear the gospel, of course.

But in particular, those who face the very real prospect of injury or death need **someone** to share with them the Hope, Joy, Peace, Redemption, Forgiveness and Eternal Salvation that comes through Christ Jesus.

And so I thank you for **your** willingness to minister **with** Steve in this way to those in the Canadian Forces in your community.

I'd like to share with you a snippet from an email I received from a Chaplain friend of mine who was serving with Canadian Forces in Afghanistan a number of years back. He wrote:

This has been my 16th ramp ceremony in two months.

I stand again before a group of soldiers whom I have come to know and love.

Their job is almost unbearably difficult, and they trust me and share their stories and their burdens with me. But here I stand as their Padre [Chaplain] and they look to me to bring words of comfort that will allow them to bring a measure of closure or meaning to the pain they feel.

...

Before me are young men and women who believe so strongly in peace that they are

willing to lay down their lives for it. They are willing to do more than keep peace, they are willing to build Peace, one well, one school, one police station at a time. They are willing to carve out a peace by risking their lives in rocket and Mortar attacks, in suicide bombings. They believe so strongly in Peace that they refuse to stop hoping and building for the people of Afghanistan even after they have had to carry their close friends to a waiting Hercules.

Friends - here is a group of people who *need* to be reached out to. Here is a group that needs to hear about (and be reminded of) the Love of God ... and the hope and peace that comes through Christ Jesus!

You know ... one of the images that most frequently comes to mind when I speak to soldiers is Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem; and that image of Jesus riding into danger.

For me, that's a powerful image! Jesus, who loved so strongly, and cared so deeply, that he willingly and intentionally rode a colt into Jerusalem, knowing what await Him there.

Not danger that might (possibly) await him there, but danger that would await him there; he knew what was going to happen to him. He was constantly telling his disciples, what was going to happen.

He knew, that he would be arrested; he knew that he would be abused; he knew that he would be crucified, dead and buried.

He knew that the massive weight of human sin would be placed upon his shoulders! That He who knew **no** sin, would **be** sin so that you and I might become the righteousness of God! That He would pay the penalty for all human sin. He knew, that it would be an infinitely awful experience.

And knowing all of this – our Lord still came! Such was his love, that he was willing to pay that price. He willingly and intentionally came riding into town on a donkey and toward the danger that await him there.

But friends - he also knew that He would be raised up on the Third Day. He knew that death would not have the last word. He knew that through His death and resurrection that redemption, forgiveness, and life eternal would be available — would be possible for those who believe.

Like a seed in the ground dies to new life, so Jesus was going to die and be raised again in glory.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,” Jesus said!

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

Jesus was that seed. You and I here today, and all Christians down through history are the harvest of what Jesus did — His life, His death, His resurrection made our redemption possible. His willingness to ride into town, and give of himself, and die on a cross made it possible so that we might have life and life eternal! So that we might be forgiven and redeemed to God; and to enjoy the joy, hope, love, and peace that comes with having Christ in our lives.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,” Jesus said!

Friends ... you may recall that these words of Jesus were spoken soon after Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day. He was giving his disciples notice (once again) about what was going to happen.

And, with these words still hanging in the air, Jesus turned to his disciples and said what (for us) is perhaps the most uncomfortable and challenging part of today’s reading.

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life (in this world) will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.

Of all the things Jesus has ever said, these words would not be ranked among his most comforting — challenging, yes. Comforting, not so much!

These are not the kind of words that would typically appeal to us. These words may well make us feel uncomfortable, anxious or unsettled.

But friends I think they are also words that can challenge and encourage us to live up to our Calling.

As it did our forebearers in the faith! We are here because Christian believers, down through the ages, have shared and passed on to others the Good News of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ; through Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

And friends, that is still our mission. We are still the church! Equipped by the Holy Spirit to go into all the world and make disciples!

In essence Jesus is telling us this: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never anything more than a grain of wheat. But friends: if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over.

The one who lives life, secure as a seed — in the end, will have nothing to show for it. But, the one who gives of themselves, the one who (following Christ’s) — immerses themselves (buries themselves) in a lifestyle of love and giving and serving; the one who loves with abandon, who serves with joyful giving, who chooses and makes a point to give of themselves in the service of others – these will find *life* – and life eternal.

Those who really live, are those who live less for themselves and more for others. Those who really flourish are those whose seeds of kindness and compassion bloom around them – in the lives of others they touch and bless.

These are challenging words, no doubt about it!

But that is what God’s church is called to. Jesus said: *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.*

We are called — as Christians, as Christ’s church — to be where Christ is!

And where is He?

Well, God is with you, and he is with me. God is with us here, and with His church around the world.

God is with the least, and the last, and the lost, and the unloved.

God is with those in the military, and the police, and fire rescue. God is with those in hospitals. God is at your place of work, and in the parks. God is with the homeless, and in the suburbs.

God's Spirit is always and constantly on the move ... drawing people to Himself. Reaching out, beckoning, prompting, urging, inviting.

And where Christ is, so must his servants be! So must we be – as we are able.

We who follow Christ, are called by Christ to immerse ourselves in self-giving. And when we do, we will learn that wonderful truth – when we give, and serve as Christ did, only then will we truly live.

I'd like to close with the final comments my Chaplain friend put in his letter. He writes:

... when I look at the faces of these soldiers before me with no words of Peace of my own to give. I do what Padre's do best, what Padre's have done in Wars before mine. I bring them words of Another.

The one who promises the Peace that the World can never give. The one who not only observed the horrible brokenness of man, but also died to redeem it. Padre's can't fix things, but Jesus can! So I bring them the Gospel and the hope of the resurrection.

And friends ... so can we. In those places, and with those people God has placed us in the midst of.

Jesus said *where I am, my servant also will be.*

That is the challenge, and the mission Christ has put before us. To go out into the world. To be where He (already) is. To give of ourselves so that through our self-giving the Good News of the Gospel of Christ, might be shared and made known.

God Bless you as you reflect and consider Christ's words for your life.

AMEN.