

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 3

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I'm all in.

However bold anyone might be (I am speaking in a foolish way), I am going to be bold too. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's seed? So am I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ? (I am speaking in a crazy way.) I am even more. I've done more hard work, been in prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I've been close to death many times. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day on the open sea. ²⁶ I have often been on journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, in danger among false brothers. ²⁷ I have worked hard and struggled. I've spent many sleepless nights. I've been hungry and thirsty. I've gone without food many times. I've been cold and lacked clothing.

²⁸ Besides those external matters, there is the daily pressure on me of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak without my being weak? Who falls into sin without my being distressed?

³⁰ If it is necessary that I boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

—2 Corinthians 11:21-30

I am an idiot, and so are you. At least, that is what Chris Evans, the voice of the new Buzz Lightyear, calls you and me. You see, the new Pixar children's movie entitled "Lightyear" has a controversial scene portraying lesbianism as a natural way of life. As Bible believing Christians, we know that homosexuality is a sin. It is not a lifestyle that we should expose anybody to, including children. It is a sin that violates our Creator's design for us as human beings.

But Chris Evans, who also starred as Captain America in the Marvel films, thinks differently. He said, "The real truth is those people (referring to people like us) are idiots. Every time there's been social advancement as we wake up, the American story, the human story is one of constant social awakening and growth and that's what makes us good." He also said, "There's always going to be people who are afraid and unaware and trying to hold on to what was before. But those people die off like dinosaurs. I think the goal is to pay them no mind, march forward and embrace the growth that makes us human" (<https://nypost.com/2022/06/15>).

How do you feel about comments like that? I read those words earlier this week, and I felt a mixture of emotions. I felt anger and frustration. It makes me angry when someone calls me an idiot for following my Savior Jesus and for holding on to his will for our lives. But I also felt sorrow and sadness. Chris Evans, and so many others, are paving a path that leads straight to hell. Disney is trying to indoctrinate our children with sinful lifestyles that clearly go contrary to God's will. Instead of believing Jesus and following him, they are promoting a sinful lifestyle and telling Christians to die off like the dinosaurs. "Get out of the way and let us humans progress," they are saying.

What if that actually happened? Can you imagine what life would be like if Christians no longer stood for the truth? What if Chris Evans and others got their way? What if God took all the Christians out of this world and just let people do whatever they wanted without any compass guiding toward God's will? What if we just left the world pursue its own agenda without speaking up for God's agenda? What if we no longer taught the truth of God's will and word for our lives? What would life be like?

I shudder to think about that for it would be hell. Without God's will and ways revealed to us in his Word, there would be no salvation. All would perish.

So, my friends, I give thanks to God for every single one of you. You and I declare together, "We believe." God's Word has taken root in your life, and through that Word Christ creates committed followers. We recognize that the people in our world need us because they need Jesus. But I would ask you to do an introspective analysis of your life today. We all confess that we follow Jesus, right? But what *kind* of follower are you?

We are facing a lot of situations in our nation right now: from abortion rights to gender dysphoria; from homosexuality to people living together outside of marriage. With all the situations that we are facing in our nation right now, it's important for us to answer the question. What kind of follower are you?

Do you just follow Jesus when it feels safe, comfortable, and convenient? Or do you follow Jesus even when life gets tough and your reputation or even your life is on the line? Are you okay with being called an idiot because you follow Jesus and stand firmly on his words? Or do you try to appease the other side by avoiding the controversy? Are you ready to jump into the dialogue and clearly say that abortion is not a political issue, but a moral issue; a sin? Or do you just avoid the conversation all together? What kind of follower of Jesus are you?

So, let me ask you: Are you all in? Are you willing to put everything in your life and everything you stand for and everything you identify with in line with being a follower of Christ? Are you all in?

Before you answer that question, let me share with you some insightful truths about the apostle Paul. You know Paul. He was the guy who used to call followers of Jesus idiots. It was even worse than that. He didn't just say those words, he tried to eliminate Jesus' followers, giving approval for their arrest and even death.

Well, by the grace of God, Jesus changed Paul. He completely transformed him. The word of Christ came to Paul and changed him from a persecutor to a proponent of Christ. The word of Christ transformed him from an enemy to a child of God.

And Christ's word made a committed follower out of Paul. Everything he did was for his Savior. God sent Paul on some missionary journeys to spread the word of Christ. Paul and his traveling companions went from city to city being salt and light for the world. One of those places where Paul started a Christian congregation was in the city of Corinth.

Years later, when Paul wrote his letters to the Christians living in Corinth, there were some bad apples that tried to destroy Paul's reputation. In fact, they bad-mouthed Paul so severely that there were some Christians who turned away from the truth of the gospel to a different message. These bad apples, often referred to as the "super-apostles," said that Paul was an idiot. He didn't know what he was talking about. He was soft. He wasn't very eloquent. He wasn't fully committed to being a follower of Jesus.

Well, Paul was concerned for these Christians in Corinth because the only message that Paul ever wanted to preach was the message of Jesus who lived, died, and rose to give salvation. "We preach Christ-crucified"(1 Corinthians 1:23) was always Paul's goal. So, when there were people leading Christians away from the message that centered on Christ alone, Paul could not take it any longer.

He needed to defend the message. So, he uses some of the tactics of these so-called "super-apostles" to show that the message he shared was worth listening to. He starts to rattle off evidence of why the people could see Paul as a fully committed follower of Christ.

Now, Paul calls what he is doing in these words some "foolish talk." He wants it to be known that he considers it foolish talk because it sounds as if he is boasting. But he felt compelled to do this just to show that whatever the "super-apostles" claim for themselves, Paul could claim even more.

These words give us a unique perspective into the life of Paul. Here is a man who essentially is saying, "I'm all in. I am fully committed to following Jesus." Just look at some of the things Paul went through because he was a follower of Christ.

"I've done more hard work, been in prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I've been close to death many times. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day on the open sea. I have often been on journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, in danger among false brothers. I have worked hard and struggled. I've spent many sleepless nights. I've been hungry and thirsty. I've gone without food many times. I've been cold and lacked clothing" (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Paul went through all those things because he followed Jesus. And many people hated him for what he stood for and for the message he shared. What's more is that Paul had people in his heart and mind. He was constantly thinking about and praying about the spiritual welfare of others. He writes, "Besides those external matters, there is the daily pressure on me of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who falls into sin without my being distressed?" (2 Corinthians 11:28,29).

Paul had such a genuine concern for people and a yearning for their spiritual welfare. He was all in. Not just for himself, but for others as well. Paul was fully committed to following Jesus and making Jesus and his ways known to the people of this world.

And do you know why Paul was like that? Oh, certainly because God the Holy Spirit had brought Paul to faith. Yes. "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him." The Holy Spirit brings us to faith and to this commitment of following Jesus. Certainly. But why was Paul so committed to following Jesus and to making Jesus known?

If you read through Paul's letters, there is always a perspective that drives him to do and say what he does. It's Judgment Day. This world will not last. Jesus is coming back. Judgment Day is coming. Every single person who has ever lived in this world will need to stand before Jesus on Judgment Day. Every single person will stand before the perfect and righteous Judge of all. The day of reckoning is coming. Paul understood that, and so do we. Paul was 100% committed to following Jesus and making Jesus and his ways known. Paul was all in, and so are we.

We are fully committed to following Jesus. We are committed to losing ourselves in Christ. And here's something that doesn't make a lot of sense. In losing ourselves in Christ, we actually discover ourselves. Do you know what I mean by that? Sometimes I think we approach life with this attitude that our time to achieve what we want in life is running out. I have so much that I want to do and accomplish, and I just don't have the time or days to do it all. Do you ever feel like that?

In Luke's Gospel for today, we see an interesting perspective. Luke says, "When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). That is a very intriguing phrase that Luke uses. "When the days were approaching..." Luke is essentially saying that as the time was being fulfilled for Jesus to be taken up, he was resolved to go to Jerusalem. Jesus' days of living in this world were coming closer and closer to their ultimate fulfillment. The days until Jesus would ascend into heaven were drawing closer. Because that is true, Jesus resolved to go to Jerusalem.

I think we can gain some perspective for ourselves in those words, too. You see, instead of looking at our days as fleeing away or as though we are losing time in this world, we can see our days and time as fulfillment where we are drawing closer and closer to being with Jesus in glory. Do you understand what I am saying?

Why do I bring this up? The truth is I'm tired of living in this world. I'm tired of little babies being murdered in abortions without having a chance to live. I'm tired of the reaction of so many people to the Supreme Court's ruling on Friday. I'm tired of Disney indoctrinating our children with sinful behaviors. I'm tired of the sin that is so prevalent around us. Evil is all around us. It is not easy living as a Christian in this world. But the truth is it never has been easy. Jesus himself told us that we will face many challenges as his followers in this world. It's painful to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus.

But it's worth it. It's worth it. Your time is being fulfilled, it is approaching, when you will be with Jesus in full glory. What we hold on to by faith will become sight. Therefore, Jesus calls us to be fully committed to following him. He wants us all in because he knows what is in store for us.

You see, whatever commitment and resolve Jesus expects of you, you will see it in Jesus for you. Jesus knew that his time of being in this world was being fulfilled as he was heading to his ascension into heaven. But there was still something that needed to be done. Not for himself, but you and me and all people. He resolved; he was determined to go to Jerusalem. And what Jesus experienced there was far worse than what Paul went through as a follower of Jesus. Jesus brutally suffered hell in our place. He willingly did that so that nobody would need to suffer hell because of sin.

Yes, it's true. Jesus resolved to go to Jerusalem to be the payment for all sin. Yes, for the sin of homosexuality. Yes, for the sin of having or performing an abortion. Yes, for the sin of pride and boasting. Yes, for the sin of cowardice in following him. He went through that cross so that glory would be established for you and me and for all who look to Jesus in faith. That is the fulfillment of Jesus' time here in this world. And now he comes to us and says, "Follow me. Be my fully committed followers."

My friends, I'm standing before you today telling you that your sins are gone. Your goal is established. You belong with Jesus forever in his glory. That is who you are. You are the glorious children of God. You are in his eternal kingdom. You know how all this will end. The victory is yours. I guarantee it because Jesus said it.

That is why we are all in. As our time of fulfillment draws closer, we can resolutely set our sights, not on Jerusalem, but on Tempe or Mesa or Laveen or Ahwatukee or Phoenix or Fountain Hills or wherever you live. People need you as a follower of Christ. And no matter what people say or do to you, you can be proud that you follow Christ. I'm all in. Are you? Amen.