

What Are You Waiting For?

July 3, 2022

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The Gospel lesson today tells us that Jesus sent out 72 missionaries, we might call them foot soldiers, going two-by-two ahead of Him as He was making His way to Jerusalem to win the battle over sin, Satan, and death on the cross. Did you know that each state of the United States can have two statues in the Capitol building honoring two people from their state that were notable in the history of that state and this nation? Interesting that none of the 72 missionaries sent out two-by-two in our reading today are named. They were servants of our Lord and did amazing things but they remain anonymous.

Yet, the 99 people in our national Capitol are all named and each has a statue in their likeness there. They stand enshrined in the building that houses our Congress, the seat of power in our democracy. Perhaps you noticed, I said there were 99. That wasn't a mistake. There is only one person currently representing the State of Virginia in Statuary Hall in the Capitol. That one person is George Washington. His leadership in the early days of our national existence was most noteworthy and I don't need to tell you about that. So, why is there only one statue currently?

In December 2020, shortly after he was elected Governor, Ralph Northam introduced a bill in the Virginia General Assembly to have the statue of Robert E. Lee removed from the crypt of the Capitol and replaced. The reason for this proposal was the fact that Lee led the military forces of

the Confederate States that supported slavery. The removal was proposed in a letter from Representatives Jennifer Wexton and Donald McEachin. The bill passed and Lee's statue was removed from its place next to George Washington on Sunday, December 21, 2020. It is now in the Virginia Museum of History and Culture in Richmond.

Lee's statue will be replaced by a statue of Barbara Rose Johns, an African-American woman who at the age of 16, led a protest at Morton High School in Farmville against the segregation of children in schools. Her actions led to the only court case against Prince Edward County on segregation ever filed by students. In 1954, this case was the basis for and was consolidated into, *Brown v. the Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*. The *Brown* case led to the desegregation of public schools in the United States and Ms. Johns' actions initiated that case.

Now, with that history, I want to tell you the two people honored in Statuary Hall in the Capitol from Pennsylvania. One is of Robert Fulton, an American engineer and inventor who is widely credited with developing the world's first commercially successful steamboat, the North River Steamboat, commonly called the *Clermont*. His successful invention made possible efficient, profitable river traffic and trade on the major rivers of the nation. But you probably knew him.

The other person honored by the State of Pennsylvania is largely unknown today. His name is John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg. He was born in Trappe, Pennsylvania, about 30 miles northwest of Philadelphia. Trappe is the site of Augustus Lutheran Church, the oldest unchanged Lutheran church building in the United States in continuous use by

the same congregation. Muhlenberg's statue is marble and found in the crypt of the Capitol. The statue of Muhlenberg shows him dressed in the uniform of a Colonial soldier but over his right shoulder is the clerical robe of a minister of the Gospel. Muhlenberg was a Lutheran pastor. His father was also a Lutheran pastor in Pennsylvania. The younger Pastor Muhlenberg studied religion at what we now call the University of Pennsylvania. His first congregation was in Bedminster, New Jersey assisting his father. As more and more German Lutherans from Pennsylvania settled in the Shenandoah Valley, here in Virginia, Pastor Muhlenberg was called to serve the congregation of Emanuel Lutheran Church in Woodstock, Virginia. Woodstock is about ten miles south of where I-66 and I-81 meet in the Shenandoah Valley.

Muhlenberg was a dedicated patriot. His disgust for Britain's colonial rule was partly due to his being forced to go to England to be ordained as an Anglican priest. The Anglican faith was the established religion of the colony of Virginia, the only recognized one. So, although almost all the locals of his church were Lutherans, they had to officially operate as Anglicans. Even though Pastor Muhlenberg was an ordained Lutheran pastor, since the Anglican religion was the only recognized religion in Virginia before the Revolution, Pastor Muhlenberg had to go to England and be ordained as an Anglican priest to serve his congregation. If he had not done so, any marriage, baptism, or communion service, over which he presided, would be considered illegal and, therefore null and void. Ironically, Pastor Muhlenberg was serving as an Anglican pastor in an Anglican church as a Lutheran pastor with a large German congregation.

Now, he is remembered for an event that is purported to have occurred on Sunday, January 21, 1776. Pastor Muhlenberg was preaching on Ecclesiastes 3, which begins ***"For everything there is a season..."*** after reading verse 8, the concluding verse, which reads, ***"a time of war, and a time of peace,"*** he declared, ***"And this is the time of war."***

At that moment, legend says Pastor Muhlenberg removed his clerical robe to reveal his Colonel's uniform. Outside the church door, the drums began to roll summoning men to duty. The men of the congregation turned and kissed their wives goodbye, walked out down the center aisle of the church, and enlisted in military service of what was to be called the 8th Virginia Regiment of the Continental Army. Within a half-hour, 162 men were enlisted. The next day, led by Pastor Muhlenberg, 300 men from the county marched off to war against the British. Pastor Muhlenberg saw service in numerous states and eventually was brevetted to Major General by the end of the Revolutionary War. He was an infantry commander at the Battle of Yorktown at the end of the war for independence. At that battle, he assisted the Prussian General, Friedrich von Steuben, who you probably know as Baron von Steuben, who introduced practices in the Continental Army which are still found in army manuals today.

Tomorrow, we will celebrate the date, July 4th in 1776, when the members of the Continental Congress ratified the Declaration of Independence. With this document, they declared that the American colonies would no longer subject themselves to the rule of Britain and the monarchy of King George III. It was a bold and dangerous act that resulted in death for many thousands of American colonials – military and civilian.

Pastor Muhlenberg was as ardent about independence as he was ardent about the Bible. He faced a physical and very real enemy in the British crown, its army, and the Loyalists colonists here in the colonies.

The force that Jesus commissioned, as his 72 missionaries, faced an invisible but far more formidable enemy in Satan and his foes. Many of the people, who those missionaries encountered, were hostile to them too, in towns like Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. The number of soldiers in the Continental army was never adequate. Jesus told his “infantry” that the workers were few but the harvest, the number of souls to be saved, was plentiful. The Continental Army was woefully short of supplies, equipment, training, food, and uniforms for most of the war. Jesus directed His army of missionaries to travel light. He told them to take no purse, bag, or sandals. He told them to live off the generosity of the people in the towns they would visit. By all accounts, the Continental Army should have been defeated. By the grace of God, they were not and we are here because of their success. It is one thing to vote for an idea. It is another to successfully defend it. Jesus sent His missionaries out as **“lamb among the wolves.”** They professed Jesus in faith and by the grace of God they succeeded, and we are here. The Patriots, who fought for our independence and freedom, were much the same. They were a rag-tag army against a well-trained and equipped military and naval force. The Patriots could only trust in God. Jesus told His missionaries **“I have given you authority ... to overcome all the power of the enemy.”** Adding, **“He who listens to you, listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”**

Today, we are the army of Jesus – you and me. By His suffering, death on the cross, and resurrection from the tomb, Jesus defeated the devil for us. But unlike the British who were defeated at the Battle of Yorktown, only to return one more time in the War of 1812, the devil, and the evil sin he encourages, still lurks relentlessly as our enemy. He prowls looking to capture innocent souls and hold them under his rule. He lies in ambush to take us as his prisoners. We see the effects of his work daily in our contemporary world – the deaths of children by a variety of means. Sadism and sexism across the land. Hatred and hostility were no less than that between the followers of Jesus and His enemies and the Loyalists against the Patriots during the Revolutionary era. Covetousness and idolatry lead to greed, theft, divorce, materialism, and war. A love of self that leads to indifference and contempt for God and His Law and a disregard for the love of our neighbors. We are in a time when humans have declared their independence from God and rebelled against Him. Like Pastor Muhlenberg, each of us can say, *“this is a time of war.”* AND, it is a time of war, a spiritual war, and we are both potential victims while at the same time the infantry soldiers against it.

You and I are called to be the foot soldiers in the fight against Satan and the sin of this world over which he rules. We have an all-powerful commander in Jesus. We are well-armed with the Scripture, the Law, and the Gospel, our faith in God, and our trust in His power to lead and guide us to victory. The harvest, the souls needing love, forgiveness, salvation, and faith, is indeed plentiful and the battle is life-long.

In the end, we will not be a statue in the hall of an earthly building but something better. We will have a crown of glory in the everlasting halls of heaven. Jesus told His missionaries that they should rejoice ***“that their names are written in heaven.”*** And, with our service to Jesus as His missionaries, we can look forward to our names being inscribed in heaven where we will hear the words, ***“Well done, you, good and faithful servant.”***

Jesus told His missionaries in the text, and us, do not fear, even though you are like lambs among wolves. Jesus says, ***“nothing will harm you.”*** He says, ***“I have given you the power to overcome all the power of the enemy.”*** We only need to put our trust in Him just like our coins tell us. And we cannot rest until the work of the harvest is done. Jesus did not rest until He finished the work set before Him on the cross. Pastor Muhlenberg did not rest, neither did George Washington rest nor did the Patriots who fought for our independence in the 18th Century. Nor did Barbara Johns who fought for equality and dignity for children. All fulfilled the commission of Jesus in their life.

It is a time of war – a spiritual war and we, in this nation, as Christian foot soldiers of Jesus, must rise to the occasion in His name for the salvation of the souls who remain vulnerable and defenseless.

So, the question today is: ***“What are you waiting for?”*** Following Pastor Muhlenberg’s example, what field of battle will you choose as you leave this sanctuary today to fight for Jesus? Will it be your family, your friends, your neighborhood, your place of work, at VBS, at Bible study, in Sunday school, or with yourself? Jesus has called you to serve Him. He has commissioned you, and me, with the

words – Go, baptize, and teach in His name and to His glory. He did not say, sit here and wait for someone to come to you. He said, **“Go.”** He sends us just as He sent the 72. Where is the faith you so boldly confess? In whom do you place your trust? Jesus is waiting for us to take action like Peter Muhlenberg. How will you **“go”** as soldiers of Jesus? To His glory and in His name. Amen.