

Sermon for Sunday, August 27, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"THE JESUS WALKATHON"
Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Text: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for those are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would." Galatians 5:16-17

For some reason I don't fully understand, we are having all sorts of walks today. We have walks for mankind, walks for the environment, walks for various organizations and not too long ago here in St. Louis, we actually had a walk for the wolves. Now, the way it seems to work is that a person gets you to pay him so much a mile for how far he walks. The more people he gets the more money he makes for the organization for which he is walking. A young man about ten years old came to my door recently and he was walking for some organization or cause. He wanted me to pay him so much a mile. "Young man," I said to him, "It is dangerous for you to walk out on the side of the road like that. Suppose I give you five dollars for your cause if you won't walk at all." He thought that over for a moment and then shook his head. "No, Mister, he said, "I gotta walk."

Well, I wish more people felt that way about walking for Jesus. Let me take two statements from the Bible, one by Jesus and one from St. Paul in our scripture for this morning, and put them side by side. The statement by Jesus is found in the 14th chapter of St. John. Jesus says, "And I will pray the Father and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever...for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you." (St. John 14:15, 16, 17, 18) So, Jesus says that if we love Him, we will live for Him--we will keep His commandments--and He will send the Spirit to be with us. Now, in our scripture for this morning, St. Paul says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit..." So, Jesus says that He is giving us the Holy Spirit and St. Paul says that we are to walk by that same Spirit.

Let me ask you a question this morning. Are you walking for Jesus? You know a walkathon implies duration. It demands endurance. It demands keeping on. St. Paul says we are in a walkathon for Jesus. He says we are to keep on walking by the Spirit. Are you doing that? Well, the person sitting beside you is having the same trouble and I am too! It is really hard to keep walking for Jesus. Do you know why that is? Well, St. Paul tells us why it is so hard to keep on living our lives for Jesus. St. Paul says that there are two forces at work in the hearts of us Christians. He calls the first force the flesh. He is simply talking about our humanness, our humanity. St. Paul doesn't think much of our humanness. He says the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit. Is that true in your life? I know it is in mine. St. Paul writes, "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like." That is not a very pretty picture of man and sometimes I feel St. Paul was peeking into my heart when he wrote those words!

But Paul says there is another force at work in us. He writes, "the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh." That's a relief, isn't it? Isn't it wonderful to know that the Spirit of God is at work in us to help us walk for Jesus? Well, that's what Jesus promised. He said, "I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you." And

when we walk for Jesus, when we live a Spirit-controlled life, St. Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."

So there are two forces at work in the heart of the Christian--the flesh and the Spirit. When we live by the flesh, bad things happen; when we walk by the Spirit, good things happen.

How are you walking this morning? Are you living a Spirit-controlled life? Are you walking for Jesus?

Well, how do you live a Spirit-controlled life? How do you keep on walking with Jesus? Are there some things we can do that will keep us moving with the Lord? There are several things I have found essential in my own life that help me in my walk for Jesus. They are simply, basic things, but sometimes we Christians ignore the simple things. Let me share them with you.

To keep on walking for Jesus you must read God's Word every day. Don't leave this step out--it won't work. The Bible is where God speaks to us and where he makes His will known to us. I have people say to me, "Well, Pastor, God told me this," or, "God told me that," or "God spoke to me in a dream." Well, how do you know it was God? Maybe it was really the enchiladas and onions you had for dinner that caused your dream. Or maybe it was your subconscious needs and desires asserting themselves. The only way I can know if God is speaking to me or leading me is to measure what I think is God against what I know is God, His Holy Word. God is consistent. God does not contradict Himself. I can't trust what I think I hear until I measure it against the word because I can't trust myself. I'll tell you truthfully, I do not know a single person who is walking with Jesus who isn't steeping himself in the Bible, the Word of God.

I have people tell me about their feelings. They say something like this, "I feel this is right," or "I don't feel this is really wrong." You can't trust feeling, but you can trust the Word of God! Do you have some question about some activity, about how you spend your time or your money or your energy? Go to the Word, it will tell you. Do you wonder about your relationship to some person or maybe for you young people, you wonder about what you should or shouldn't do in relationship to a boy or a girl friend? Go to the Bible. It will tell you. You may not like what it tells you, but it will tell you the truth. If you want to walk with Jesus, you can trust the Word. Your feelings will often mislead you, but the Bible never will.

You young people who want to walk with Jesus, find a time every day and spend a few minutes in the Word. You housewives, set aside a quiet time each day and spend a few minutes in the Bible. You working people, take one of your coffee breaks and spend the time at your desk reading the Word. Yes, in the walkathon for Jesus, I need the guidance of His Word.

The second basic, simple thing for me in trying to live a Spirit-controlled life is prayer. Show me a man who isn't praying regularly and I'll show you a man dropping out of the walkathon. Some people think of prayer as a sort of spiritual "gimme" time--"Lord gimme this; Lord, gimme that.." Making our needs known to God is a part of prayer, but prayer is much more than that. Prayer is saying, "thank you." Prayer is praising God. Prayer is quietly and deliberately telling self to get off the throne of the heart so Jesus can sit there. It is letting those rivers of living water flow through the soul to wash away the silt, dirt and debris. It is

listening for the still, small voice. If we omit this in our walk for Jesus, our feet will get tired.

A third step in living a Spirit-controlled life is fellowship with other Christians. I certainly can't live a Christian life by myself and neither can you. I need you to speak God's Word to me. As Bonhoeffer puts it, "The Word of Christ in the mouth of my brother is stronger than the word in my heart." So, I need you to speak God's word to me and you need me to speak His Word to you. When either of us has been tempted and fallen, we need for God's love and God's forgiveness to be made real through one another. You young people remember that. You need the fellowship of other believers to keep you walking for Jesus. It is true for all of us. Show me a man who is irregular or sporadic in his fellowship with other Christians and I will show you a man over whom Jesus is losing control. Is that true in your life? The less we relate to the company of believers, the more we drop out of the Jesus walkathon.

A fourth step in living a Spirit-controlled life is to share your faith. One of the words the New Testament uses to describe the Spirit is the word "Fire". What happens to a fire when you isolate it? Why, it goes out. When there is a forest fire, they cut what is called a "fire-break" so they can isolate the fire and keep it from spreading. A fire that isn't spreading is a fire going out. Another word used in the New Testament for the Spirit is the word "water". To stay fresh and sweet, water must flow, it must move. Water that is unmoving, that is trapped and has no outlet, becomes stale, brackish, covered with slime and eventually will not support life. For example, in the land of Jesus there are two famous seas, the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee gives of itself. It flows out into the Jordan River to water the whole Jordan Valley and because it does, it is fresh and sweet and filled with fish. But the Dead Sea has no outlets. What it gets, it keeps. And in the Dead Sea there is no life. So it is with Christians. If we are not sharing Jesus with others our fire is going out, our spiritual sea is dead and we are lagging behind in the walkathon. You don't have to be trained to share. The most powerful words you can say to another person begins this way, "Let me tell you what Jesus means to me..." You try that this week and see what happens. Go to a friend and say, "Friend, as you are walking along through life, let me walk along with you for a little way. As we walk, I want to tell you about my friend, Jesus..."

A fifth step that I find essential in my life as I try to walk with Jesus is what Bill Bright, President of Campus Crusade, calls spiritual breathing. When you practice spiritual breathing, you exhale by confessing and you inhale by appropriating forgiveness. As you walk with Jesus you will find that you will stumble and fall. By some deed that cannot be undone or some word that cannot be unsaid you will sin and it will cause blisters on your spiritual feet. It is painful to walk on blisters. So to keep on walking with Jesus we have to practice spiritual breathing. When we sin we must exhale by confessing our sin. And when we inhale, we appropriate God's forgiveness. You see, the Bible says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9) So, we can walk with Jesus better when we are practicing spiritual breathing, when we are exhaling in confession of sin and inhaling in appropriating God's wonderful forgiveness.

I have a dear friend down in Texas who is an alcoholic. One day, after he had been drunk for over 20 years, he came into a new relationship with Jesus. He asked the Lord to deliver him from the desire and the need to drink and God healed him in a marvelous way. For the first time in years he knew what it was to go through a

day not only sober, but without even the desire for a drink. He was so excited about what God had done for him. The days, the weeks, the months and even the years went by and he was still sober. Then one day disaster struck his family. His business went sour, his wife became ill and grew steadily worse. Surgery was required and the process of returning health was slow and discouraging. The burdens, both financial and emotional, were tremendous, and they took their spiritual toll. Then my friend got drunk again. Finally, when we had him in the hospital again, I visited him. "My friend," I asked him, "what happened to you?" He looked off into space for a moment and then he turned eyes brimming with tears to look at me. Sadly he said, "I got away from God. I quit walking with Jesus."

Simply because he is and will always be an alcoholic, when my friend quits walking with Jesus it will be obvious. When you are blind drunk, it is obvious to everybody. For you and me, when we stop walking with Jesus, it may not be so obvious to the world, but the tragic results will be just as disastrous.

My friend asked Jesus to take over his life again. He began to read the word again, to pray, to fellowship, to share, to practice spiritual breathing and today he is still sober. How about you? Are you still walking with Jesus? Maybe in times passed you walked with Him but have dropped out of the walkathon this morning. If that is true in your life, will you recommit your heart to Him this morning. You see, it is only when you walk with Jesus, when you live a Spirit-controlled life, that you can know love, joy, peace, and all the fruit of the Spirit.