

## **-Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(March 25, 2018)

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: The King Who Served**

(Palm Sunday)

## **Jesus, Fighting Mad**

(Mark 11:1-18)

Study #2

### **Introduction:** What our anger reveals...

I was sitting at my desk on Thursday afternoon, working away on today's message - which is mainly about a time when Jesus got angry - when my PC froze...and I got angry.

Anger is a powerful emotion. I learned long ago to see anger as a normal emotional response to a blocked goal.

Anger can be justified or unjustified, unrighteous or righteous. Held on to, anger becomes a big problem. But, anger is *initially* a normal, even a healthy, way to respond to a blocked goal.

On Thursday, my goal to research, to compile, and to create was blocked by the spinning "busy cursor" on the screen. Anger followed.

Try to remember the last time you experienced anger.

Was it while driving on 1604? Was it at work? At home? At school? Did it involve a close relationship? A treasured possession? A scheduling issue? Did it happen this morning on the way to church?

Your anger likely involved a blocked goal. Something or someone got in your way and you weren't able to do what you wanted to do. You couldn't have what you wanted to have.

My Thursday anger over a frozen computer wasn't a big deal. The issue resolved quickly and I got over it and moved on in a mature, deeply-spiritual way, just like you'd expect. I doubt that Jeff and Landry and Manuel and Jackie even heard the screams from behind my closed study door.

There have been other times, though, when anger was more of a problem for me and took longer to get past.

I'll bet you can think of times when you got angry and recovered quickly. You moved on.

And, that there have been those times when your anger wasn't so easily brushed aside. A passionately pursued goal was blocked. Something that you viewed as essential to your well-being was derailed and anger rose from the deep recesses of your soul and everybody knew you were angry.

The closer a blocked goal is to something core about us, the deeper the anger; and, the deeper the anger, the harder it is to suppress.

Yes, there is justified and there is unjustified anger. And sometimes we get angrier about something than we should. But anger is a part of our God-given, human makeup. And there is a time and a place for an anger that fulfills the purpose for which God gave anger.

Today, we are going to see an angry outburst from Jesus.

It may surprise you to see Jesus angry. But you should know that there are several occasions in the Gospels where Jesus is portrayed as angry. Here, though, His anger turns violent.

This is anger over a significant matter. And by recording this incident in his Gospel, Mark has given us great insight into Jesus' deep passions and core values.

Before the scene of Jesus' anger, we'll follow the path He followed as He and His disciples moved from Galilee to Jerusalem.

*Going "up" to Jerusalem"*

It was on this journey that James and John had asked Jesus to be "first" in His kingdom. That request led to the other ten apostles becoming "indignant." Their indignation plus the request prompted Jesus to remind His followers of the centrality of servanthood.

They continued on their way south to Jericho, where Jesus gave sight to the blind man, Bartimaeus. Then, leaving Jericho, they walked the final twenty miles - uphill all the way - to Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus and the twelve stayed in the village of Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem, with their good friends, Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

When it came time to finally enter Jerusalem, on what we call Palm Sunday (THIS Sunday), Jesus set in motion His plan for a grand entrance into Jerusalem.

### **The Conquering King (Mark 11:1-11)**

#### **King Jesus Chooses His Steed (vv. 1-7)**

*Instructions (vv. 1-2)*

***[11:1] As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, [2] and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here.***

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<sup>1</sup> The elevation of Jericho is about eight hundred feet *below* sea level, while Jerusalem is right at 2700 feet *above* sea level. From the Sea of Galilee (which, at 700 feet below sea level, is the lowest freshwater lake in the world) southward, the Jordan River is all below sea level. Thus, Jesus' trek would have involved a hike on rough roads through rugged territory and a 3,500-foot gain in elevation.

This is Jesus, orchestrating. He wants His Jerusalem entrance to be "just so." He is orchestrating an entrance as the Messiah's entrance was envisioned by the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah.

***[9:9] Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your King is coming to you;  
He is just and endowed with salvation,  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

When a king rolled into a city on a donkey's colt, he was saying to the citizens, "*No need for a war horse. Relax. My kingdom is secure.*"

Jesus was saying to the crowds who were streaming in to Jerusalem for Passover, "*I've got everything under control. Nothing to worry about. Relax. The Kingdom of God is just where I want it.*"

So, He needed a colt. How will He secure a colt?

Simple. He commissioned two of His disciples to go into the village (Bethphage), find a colt, and bring it to Him. He's the king. The king can do this.

He even told them how to handle any resistance they might encounter.

*Preparations (v. 3)*

***[3] "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here."***

Sure enough, when the two disciples tried to take the first colt they saw, someone objected. They followed Jesus' instructions and the owners gave permission to take it.

*Mission: Accomplished (v. 7)*

***[7] They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it.***

With Jesus seated on the colt, surrounded by His disciples, He began riding down the slopes of the Mount of Olives, toward Jerusalem.

### **The King Approaches (vv. 8-10)**

*Treated like royalty (v. 8)*

At that time of year (exactly THIS time of year) the road Jesus was traveling was packed with tens of thousands of Jews making their way to the capitol to celebrate Passover.<sup>2</sup>

And, as King Jesus descended into the Kidron Valley and then rode up toward the Golden Gate - the gate through which the kings always entered Jerusalem - the people on the road got all stirred up.

Now, these crowds had NOT come to Jerusalem to see Jesus. They were on the road because of Passover.<sup>3</sup>

But, when those who knew about Jesus recognized Him, they told their fellow-travelers stories of Jesus' healings and miracles.

As they watched Him riding a donkey the last mile to Jerusalem, they put two and two together, and figured, *"This is it! He's come to set up the kingdom!"*

And they began to treat Jesus the way people in a monarchy treat their king.

***[8] And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields.***

See, you don't want the king to get His feet dirty. You don't even want the king's donkey to get dirty hooves.

They treated Him as a king. And they spoke to Him the way people speak to a king.

*King Jesus, the Messiah (vv. 9-10)*

***[9] Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting:  
"Hosanna!  
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;  
[10] Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David;  
Hosanna in the highest!"***

*"Hosanna" is a Hebrew word that means, "Save us NOW!"*

It is a cry of desperation, shouted by people who were realizing that HERE was a Man who held the key to their salvation.

Of course, the "salvation" they were thinking of was almost certainly salvation from Rome's tyranny, while Jesus had come to deliver them from the more terrible tyranny of sin.

But, they did see their desperate plight. They did recognize that they could not save themselves. And they did beg King Jesus for deliverance.

Then they cried out, ***"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"***

That is a quote from Psalm 118, a psalm that was read in ancient times when the Jewish king led the people to worship in the temple. It was a very popular line in the days of Jesus. People quoted it to express their hopes and dreams for the coming of Messiah.

On this particular day, Palm Sunday, the crowds saw in Jesus the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams.

THAT is the Triumphal Entry. That's the main event of Palm Sunday, and it was a short-lived popularity.

<sup>2</sup> Conservative estimates put the population in Jerusalem and vicinity at upwards of 1,000,000 people during the Feast days.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus traveled to the city at the time of the Jewish Passover, the yearly festival that commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Passover celebrated the deliverance of the Jewish first-born males of the families that had sprinkled lamb's blood on the doorpost when the death angel came through Egypt.

It lasted as long as it took for Jesus to ride on the back of a donkey the mile from the Mount of Olives to the Temple Gate.<sup>4</sup>

What could that be - thirty minutes? An hour? Surely not much more than that. Yet in that brief time, Jesus presented Himself to Israel as the king He was.

*Responding to King Jesus today...*

From the beginning of His life, some people had seen that Jesus was a king.

Herod the Great was the king who reigned over Israel when Jesus was born. He was so convinced of Jesus' royalty that he ordered the slaughter of all the baby boys around Bethlehem to try and kill Jesus and to do away with his competition.<sup>5</sup>

The Gospel of John tells us that Nathaniel, one of the earliest disciples, said to Jesus, "**Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the king of Israel.**"<sup>6</sup>

But for most of His life Jesus was a king *incognito*, under the radar. He served. He showed the way to greatness by working His way to the back of the line, away from the limelight.

Palm Sunday was the one exception to the general rule of His life's commitment to lastness and leastness and lowliness.

He was then and He is now the king.

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<sup>4</sup> On another occasion, recorded in John 6, a great crowd of people wanted to crown Him king. They wanted to take Him by force to make Him king, but He would have nothing of it. He preached what we call "The Bread of Life" sermon on that occasion, and the upshot of that message was that His followers dropped from thousands to exactly twelve. But here, on this Palm Sunday, He agreed to receive the praise of the crowds. On this day, as He said in another place, if the crowds of people had been silent, the rocks would have cried out. (Luke 19)

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 2.

<sup>6</sup> John 1:49 - This was after Jesus identified him as an Israelite in whom there was no guile.

And for us egalitarian citizens of the democratic republic called the USA who don't have a lot of experience dealing with royalty, here's how to respond to a king. You submit to Him. You obey Him.

The proper response to King Jesus is submission.

"**Jesus is Lord**" has been the cry of the church for two thousand years. And it is our cry this morning.

He is the King, the Lord, the Sovereign. And He is calling you, His child, to submit to His lordship today!

*Off to the Temple*

So, yes, Jesus is lord and king. And, He is our example. We get our marching orders from His COMMANDS *and* we take our cues for action from His ACTIONS.

In what follows, we will discover what it takes to provoke King Jesus to anger, and what should prompt an equally strong, passionate response, in us.

We watch Jesus on post-Palm Sunday Monday.

### **The Cleansing King (vv. 15-18)**

#### **Entering the Holy City (v. 15a)**

Jesus had entered Jerusalem on the first day of the week (Sunday). He went back to spend the night in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and then returned to the city on Monday.

***[15a] Then they came to Jerusalem...***

Once inside the city walls, Jesus and His disciples walked through the huge Passover crowds, to the temple.

In the Old Testament we read of a temple built by Solomon.

That temple was a magnificent structure, beautiful in every detail and dedicated to the worship of God. In 1 Kings, chapter 8, we read Solomon's prayer of dedication, when the temple was first placed in service. It's an awe-inspiring prayer.

King Solomon prayed that the temple would always remind Israel of God and His ways and that God would always be honored by the holy uses to which the temple was put.

And his prayer makes clear, too, that the temple was not ONLY for the Jews. Listen.

***[1 Kings 8:41] "Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name's sake [42] (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, [43] hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name."***

From the very beginning, the purpose of the temple was to draw *all* people to God, not just Israel. The prophet Isaiah writes about the same thing.

***[Isaiah 2:2] Now it will come about that  
In the last days  
The mountain of the house of the LORD  
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,  
And will be raised above the hills;  
And all the nations will stream to it.  
[2] And many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
To the house of the God of Jacob;  
That He may teach us concerning His ways  
And that we may walk in His paths."  
For the law will go forth from Zion  
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.***

Solomon's temple was to serve as an advertisement of God's goodness and grace to Israel *and* to a world of people beyond Israel God desperately loved.

But the temple that Jesus walked into was not that temple. Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonian army when Jerusalem was sacked by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

A century later, the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel when he and other refugees from exile returned to Jerusalem to re-establish the worship of God in the city. This is not THAT temple, either.

The temple of Jesus' day was the temple built by King Herod the Great. Herod's temple was much less ornate and beautiful than Solomon's, but much more massive than Zerubbabel's.<sup>7</sup>

Solomon's temple and Zerubbabel's temple and Herod's temple were different in size and grandeur. But the purpose of the temple never changed. The temple was to honor God and it was to draw Jews and non-Jews alike to learn about and to worship the one, true God.

Once Jesus got inside the temple precincts, He saw something that made His blood boil. He saw marketplace activity - ***[15] buying and selling*** - in the temple.

### **The King Enforces the Law (vv. 15b-16)**

*The need for marketplace activity*

Now, the activities Mark describes were perfectly legitimate.

The Jews were required to pay a temple tax and the tax had to be paid in Jewish currency. Money had to be exchanged from Roman to Hebrew currency to pay the tax.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Jerusalem was destroyed - along with Herod's Temple - in AD 70 by the Romans.

<sup>8</sup> Actually, the currency was Tyrian, the currency with coinage closest to the old Hebrew shekel.

And, there was a need for animals to be bought and sold to be offered as sacrifices. The sacrificial system required the offering of certain animals. The approaching Passover season made necessary the sacrifice of lambs.

And, for all these transactions there was a market in place located on the Mount of Olives, just outside the city walls of Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Mount of Olive Market*

In fact, there were as many as four different markets placed on the Mount of Olives. These markets were set up like typical middle-eastern bazaars and were places where you could exchange your money, purchase animals for sacrifice, and buy other stuff, too.

These markets were built outside the city to keep commercial transactions - buying and selling - separate from the temple.

And, now, just a clarifying word about how the Jerusalem temple was set up.

### *Temple protocol*

Think of the temple as a building arranged in a series of concentric circles radiating outward.

At the center of the temple was an inner sanctum called “the Holy of Holies” where only the High Priest could go, once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Beyond the Holy of Holies was the Holy Place, where priests carried out their regular service of worship.

Outside of the Holy Place was the more general Court of the Priests, then the Court of Israel, then the Court of the Women, and, on the outer periphery, the Court of the Gentiles.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> So, Lane, France, in their commentaries.

<sup>10</sup> The Court of the Gentiles was a wide enclosure that provided access to the interior parts of the Temple precincts, from which it was separated by a high

In the Jewish temple, there was a court for everybody - even for non-Jews. And this arrangement reflects what we have already heard in Solomon’s prayer and Isaiah’s vision.

But something was happening when Jesus walked through Herod’s temple that violated the spirit of universal worship of the one, true God.

### *A temple market?*

Caiaphas, who was serving as the High-Priest at this time, made a calculated decision to open up a new market, in the temple, for animal purchases and for money-changing.<sup>11</sup>

This temple market was opened to be in direct competition with the Mount of Olives markets. And, by the time Jesus walked through the temple market, it had become famous for its flea-market atmosphere.

In addition, inequities abounded in the temple market.

Sheep were being sold for sacrifice at well above-market prices.<sup>12</sup> Money-changers were charging exorbitant rates for the exchange of foreign currency for “temple coins.”

When Jesus saw what was going on, He became angry. Very angry.

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partition-wall. This Court was not to be used as a thoroughfare to the inner areas of the temple, but it was generally not given much respect.

<sup>11</sup> Some scholars believe that the practice of purchasing animals for sacrifice in the Court of the Gentiles was a recent innovation, starting within a few years of Jesus’ trips to Jerusalem at Passover.

<sup>12</sup> I’ve read accounts of Jewish pilgrims who came to Jerusalem to worship. They had money to buy an animal for sacrifice, would pay their money and watch as the animal was taken behind a curtain, presumably to be offered as a sacrifice. After the purchaser left, though, the same animal would be brought back out and sold to others throughout the day for the same purpose.

*Jesus unleashed (v. 15b-16)*

***[15b]...And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; [16] and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple.<sup>13</sup>***

The misuse of the temple was all it took to provoke King Jesus to anger. This act of enraged violence was thoroughly premeditated. He was not being impulsive and He never “lost it.” He simply put together a plan to cleanse the temple and He carried out that plan.

It was a remarkable act, and among the many ways in which it was remarkable, I have always found it most remarkable that nobody tried to stop Him.<sup>14</sup>

There was a very powerful moral authority at work in what Jesus does here. On this day, He was an irresistible force moving against a great evil.

Now, this is not the only time we see Jesus angry in the Gospels. But it is the only time (except for the other temple cleansing, recorded in John 2) we see Him violent.

He explains why He reacted so strongly.

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<sup>13</sup> We are to imagine a stampede of people and animals, frantic to get out of the way of this unpredictable Jesus.

<sup>14</sup> I’ve always liked the way author John White puts it: “The [amazing thing about] the cleansing of the Temple is that protests were as feeble as they were vain. Jesus would have been sweating and panting with exertion, and yet there would also be a calm purposefulness in His eyes that people could not face. Sheep, oxen, pigeons, and people were forced out through the Temple gates. Still, having done so much, He did not stop. Unsuspecting merchants arriving with more animals would be startled to find their way barred [by] the Man with the unflinching gaze. It is false to assume that there was something supernatural about the awe He created. He was God, but He called down no legion of angels to help Him, nor is there any evidence that a mystical terror paralyzed the merchants. His control of the crowds was by a moral force, forged by His total lack of ambivalence and the moneychangers’ uneasy consciences.”

**Rationale for the Cleansing (v. 17)**

***[17] And He began to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS’? (my underlining) But you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”***

If you had asked Caiaphas about what he was doing setting up a market in the temple he might have responded, “*Hey, what’s the big deal. It’s not really the temple. It’s just the Court of the Gentiles.*”<sup>15</sup>

That’s right. He set up his market in the Court of the Gentiles, the one place in the whole temple where a non-Jew could worship the one, true God, the God who made Himself known to Israel.

Setting up the market THERE showed his disregard - and the disregard many others also had - for those who were far from God.

Imagine you are a Gentile who wants to know about Israel’s God. You travel all the way to Jerusalem and make your way to the temple, only to find your way to worship blocked by money-changers and sheep sales.

That was the situation that faced every non-Jew coming into the temple area in Jesus’ day.

These were people who were far from God who would never be brought near, if not here. These were people who were lost and would never be found, if not here. The market kept them out and denied them the chance to learn about and to worship God.

And it was this - getting in the way of others who were far from God coming to God - that provoked Jesus to violent anger.

His actions on Holy Week’s Monday freed up space in the temple for Gentiles. Non-Jews seeking Israel’s God could now find Him.

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<sup>15</sup> Note “for all the nations” thus identifying the location as the Court of the Gentiles.

Jesus was successful in what He did - the way is now clear for the lost to come near. Mission: Accomplished.

And now, we read of the responses of those who were present on that day to what Jesus has done.

### Aftermath (v. 18)

*The response of the rulers (v. 18a)*

**[18a] The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him...**

Instant and absolute antagonism. They could not have been more opposed, and they moved quickly. Four days after the cleansing of the temple, Jesus will be killed on a Roman cross.

And then, this.

*The response of the crowds (v. 18b)*

**[18b]... the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.**

The crowds see Jesus bucking the authority of the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, the Chief Priests and the scribes. He's claiming the moral high ground in the nation. They are astonished.

They see the most loving Man they've ever known tossing tables and freeing livestock in violent anger. It's astonishing.

But "**astonished**" is a neutral word. It can go either way.

We don't know if they are impressed and pleased and inspired or if they are disappointed and disapproving of Jesus' astonishing ways. So, we wonder.

You and I are astonished, too, but in what way?

*Your response and mine...*

Over the past week, I've probably had more time to reflect on this episode in Jesus' life than you have, so let me tell you what astonishes me and see if it doesn't resonate with you.

I'm astonished by Jesus' ...  
...deep offense at the theft of the one place reserved for the lost in God's temple;  
...compassion for those who were far from God that expressed itself in a violent, angry outburst against powerful, religious people.

I'm astonished and inspired.

And this marks the second Palm Sunday invitation we are given today.

The first invitation was to join with those who were shouting "**Hosanna!**" to Jesus as He was making His way into Jerusalem.

He is the king and He is the only One who can save from sin's tyranny. So, we gladly entrust our eternal destiny to Him. We gladly submit to King Jesus in response to the grace He has poured out on us!

The second invitation to us is to nurture the same passion Jesus had for people who are far from God and to join Jesus in His work to seek and to save the lost.

There is a personal application here. One that involves taking next steps of prayer and action.

If you want to nurture a heart like Jesus' heart, you will need to see Him in action on the pages of Scripture, watch Him love and serve others to bring them to God, think about the death He was willing to die for you.

It requires much time with Jesus, too. It takes time at His feet, worshiping and asking Him to transform your heart.



It also will require putting what you learn about Jesus into shoe leather. Taking bold steps of faith to open your mouth and speak about Jesus to your friend, to help your friend take a next step with Jesus.

In addition to that personal application, what we see in the temple provides a way for a congregational next step, too.

When we gather on a Sunday morning, we are more than a collection of individuals. We are a church. A “body” of Christ that is to function very much like the Old Testament temple.

Together, we are to honor God. And, together, we are to advertise the beauty of our God to the benefit of those who already know AND to the benefit of those who are still far away.<sup>16</sup>

Every gathering - in a worship service, in an ABF, at a Care Group, in a Bible study - creates a temple setting where we are to honor God and shine light so that people on the way can see Jesus.

So, small group leaders and participants, will you ensure that nothing that is said or done in your meetings would do anything to drive away someone who is far away? In our times of worship, can we all work hard to be sure that we don't put up any unnecessary barriers to outsiders, that we warmly welcome all who come?

Will you join me and the rest of the leadership of our church in praying that the “temple” we are here will increasingly show God's glory to everyone who walks through these doors and that we will never do anything that would prohibit someone who is far away from coming near?

## APPENDIX

\*\*\*I include excerpts from a recent email from a good friend who now lives in Dayton, Ohio, (retired) Colonel Hadley Reed, a former elder at Northwest. I was greatly encouraged by his words and hope you will be, too.

Dear Dave... [I have become], as you might imagine, somewhat disenchanted with this world and what it has offered: cancer, a daughter with permanent disabilities for whom we have yet to find wisdom about what to do with her once Lee and I are gone, Lee with her own multiplicity of health issues, etc.

It raises perhaps, the real dilemma for all Christians still stuck here on this blood-soaked, sin-wrecked, open graveyard of a planet. For I know that no matter how many natural beauties and other apparently wonderful attractions this planet may possess, they are but the dimmest ruined shadows of what heaven possesses in all true perfection.

I have often wondered why the lost don't ask this question more often: if heaven is so wonderful, why would a loving God leave his children stuck here?

For me, the answer has become rather simple and straightforward. It occurred to me during my time in US Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) when I came to know that remarkable group of men referred to as PJs, otherwise known as para-rescue operators.

Their duty is an extraordinary one. After going through the most difficult training in the DoD (it is a little-known fact that their training has a higher washout rate than Navy SEALs), among other things their job is to parachute into the most dangerous and deadly places in the world in order to seek out and rescue downed aircrew.

Typically, they jump into places in which everything from insects to plant life to animal life to human inhabitants all have a single-minded purpose, to wit, to kill them.

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<sup>16</sup> The Apostle Paul actually refers to the church as a “temple” in a number of places (See Ephesians 2:21)

Now one might reasonably ask them, why the heck do they choose to voluntarily jump into such places? It would be profoundly more reasonable for them to parachute into places like, Dallas. I mean, it makes sense: the people there are friendly, their money is good, and they all speak English.

But if you were to present such an argument to a PJ, he would look at you with amazed confusion. He would tell you that he doesn't relish the prospect of entering such terrible and hostile locales, but that he goes there for one reason and one reason only: that is where the lost guy is.

And, so it is for us.

Why would God ask us to voluntarily remain here, when heaven is so much more perfect a place? I have every reason to believe that he would forgive us for killing ourselves in order to enter that perfect place as soon as possible.

But, don't you see, THIS is where the lost guys are. And for whatever reasons (some of which he has not explained), God has invited us to join with him in this one simple but essential task: to participate in his rescue of the lost guys.