

“What Were You Doing When You Were Fourteen?”

Matthew 16:21-28

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Communion Devotion

He is known only by the nickname, Steve-O. For his protection, few details of his life are available. Though he is only fourteen, there is a bounty on his head. He is wanted by some of his country's most dangerous rebels.

Last spring, he approached a group of American soldiers in Husaybah, Iraq and told them where a cell of insurgents was hiding. These men had already killed soldiers and innocent people and were planning to kill more. His only request was that the soldiers act like they were arresting him when they invaded this cell so no one would suspect him as the informant. For you see, he would be among the insurgents. It was his home they would invade and his father they would arrest.

Can you imagine what went through Steve-O's mind during this ordeal, the fear, guilt and anxiety? I wonder how many times he mustered the courage to do this only to back down? What was he thinking just moments before approaching those soldiers? When did he realize there was no turning back?

When you were fourteen, what were you thinking about? If you were like me, you had your mind on sports, cars, money, girls and chocolate. Heavy decisions like Steve-O had to make were not even on my radar screen.

Why did Steve-O take such a risk? Why did he turn in his father? Why did he watch videos supplied by army officials and identify other insurgents? Why did he accompany Dragon Company on twenty missions pinpointing the exact location of other cell groups? Was it for money? Absolutely not. This was the first thing he told the soldiers. He wanted no money or anything else they had to offer.

Then why did he do it? He said there were two reasons. He did not want to become an insurgent. They were teaching him to hate and training him to kill along with other boys his age. He wanted no part of it.

Secondly, he could not stand by and do nothing to protect innocent people. He could not watch another person die knowing he could prevent it.

And yet, another innocent person has died. Steve-Os' mother was killed by terrorists because of his actions. He fears for other family members now.

Jesus was older than Steve-O when he grappled with some of the same issues and decisions. He knew the scribes and Pharisees were leading his people down the wrong path. Because of his faith and keen insight, he could see the impending destruction of Jerusalem and loss of innocent lives due to the religious leaders' indiscretions. He could also sense the frustration, emptiness and hopelessness of his oppressed people.

So what was he to do? Play it safe and stay in the countryside teaching and healing or go to Jerusalem, confront the leaders and offer himself to his nation as an alternative leader?

What would you have done? At thirty-three, I was too focused and preoccupied with taking care of my little family to have taken many risks. I would have played it safe, I'm sure. But not Jesus, thank goodness. He made the decision to go to Jerusalem over

the objections of his own disciples that saw the mission as too risky. He decided to appeal openly and boldly to the people to follow his leadership. Why?

Maybe he felt like Steve-O. He could not stand by and watch innocent people suffer. He could not watch Israel travel down the road of destruction without warning them and offering to help them change directions. He could not watch deceptive leaders take advantage of powerless people. He could not possess the truth about God and life and be silent or timid. He could not deny the people a choice in their destiny, hoping they would choose the way of life and peace.

He had to go to Jerusalem in spite of the risks. He had to fulfill the mission for which he was sent, to show the world a better way to live and connect all people to the God that loves them. He had to do this even if it cost him his life, which it did.

What should our response be to his great sacrifice symbolized through the sacred bread and cup? Let me ask you how you think the men and women of Dragon Company feel about Steve-O? I think you know. They can't quit expressing their gratitude and telling his story. Every soldier in this company came home safely from Iraq and Steve-O was the main reason. They are now willing to put their lives on the line to protect him. O that we would respond to Jesus' sacrifice with this same sense of gratitude and commitment.

As you take the elements this morning, thank Jesus for risking his life to give you the same choices he gave the Israelites. Express gratitude for his willingness to give you a choice on how to live your life and chart your destiny. Ask the Lord to help you make the right decision, following his example as you arrange your values and priorities, wrestle with temptation, deal with difficult people and grapple with serious problems. And then ask him to reveal the risks you need to take to help others along your way, providing you with the courage that he gave Jesus and Steve-O.