

He leads

We follow

Today's name of God, maybe is harder for us to relate to. The LORD is my Banner. The name has to do with war, and marching behind a banner, a symbol that represents you and motivates you....so maybe that seems a little foreign.

But it really shouldn't. We march behind banners all the time. For example, sports logos are some banners that people get behind. I wonder how many conversations a day start with the words, "So, what sports teams do you like?" What a simple question that has some pretty heavy underlining points. It's like the person who asks the question knows there will be one of three possible results. Either A, he'll like you, B he'll tolerate you, or C he'll right out hate you. Because banners are important, they mean something to people.

Maybe you're not into sports, but we have other banners. What about political banners? People get so excited about these banners that when they meet the other side.....it can get pretty ferocious. Because we can get passionate about whom we follow, what we think is right, what's going to help people. We love our banners. We love to publically show our support for them, we love to talk about them, we love to follow them.

So maybe, the idea of something being our banner really isn't that foreign to us. So think again about that name: the LORD is my Banner...think about how He leads, and We follow.

Our lesson happened a short time after God freed his people, the people of Israel, from slavery in Egypt. If you remember, God used 10 plagues to convince Pharaoh to let his people go. Those plagues were incredible miracles, but the miracles didn't stop there. When the Israelites were traveling through the desert to get to the land God promised them, they faced lack of water and food...but through it all, God provided for them.

Then it happened. Israel faced an attack by another country, the Amalekites. Now Moses showed he knew where to look for help by throwing up his hands to Heaven. And really, this was the lesson God wanted all of Israel to learn. He wanted them to realize, what banner they needed to follow, what banner represented them and helped them. Unfortunately, this wasn't an easy lesson for the rest of Israel to learn.

You see, all those miracles that God did to take care of Israel, giving them water from a rock, sending them manna bread and quail, all those things were preceded by Israel...just *whining*. "God why did you bring us out here to kill us! God why do you want to starve us to death! God, we'd be better off if we were still slaves in Egypt!" Now my Catechism class knows how much I don't like whining. When the whining would get bad I would write "whining" on the board, circle it, and cross it out. Imagine how much God hates whining! Yet he heard it all the time....and still he helped them.

Israel needed to know what banner was leading them, and what that banner could do for them. They were going to be heading into some very hard times. A lot of people were going to hate them, and

even try to kill them. There was only one banner that they could march under and still come out victorious, that banner was the LORD.

That's the banner we need to march under too. Think of how many conflicts you face every day. Conflicts with your boss, with your spouse, friends, your parents. It's incredible how many opportunities we have to fight with people. Have you ever paused in a fight and had to remember why you were fighting? For me, what keeps me in a fight, is usually simple selfishness. I need things done my way, I need to be seen as the one who's right, I need to look like I won....but really who wins when that happens? Nobody.....somebody just walks away hurt or angry. It's like I want to march with a banner that has my face on it...but that banner leads only to defeat. Or what about conflict within ourselves, what about when we fight with sin? If we march into those battles under our own banner, we will give into temptations every time. Because giving in feels like victory at first....but it only leads to feeling helpless, and it only shows how pitiful our banner really is.

That's why Israel's victory here wasn't just important to them, but it's so important to us too. Try and picture Moses on top of a mountain and seeing him with arms outstretched up to the LORD. When he did that the Israelites were reminded of who had been helping them. Who had been giving them water when they were thirsty, food when they were hungry....who was now going to give them victory. Because victory is what happens when God's banner leads.

What's *our* banner today? Just think about what image gets repeated the most in a church. The cross. Count how many times you can see it in front of church alone....not even including all the crosses you can see on the outside. This is the perfect banner for us to look at every day, because what does it point us to? Not an old man stretching up his arms to heaven, someone who needed help holding up his hands. But our Savior Jesus stretching *his* arms out, by himself....when they were nailed to a cross. When Jesus was crucified he gave us the single most gruesome, and yet glorious banner ever. He gave us a banner that leads us to certain victory.

When we think of our Lord Jesus as our banner, when we think of the cross, we're shown we have a God who is willing to fight for us. Who is willing to hear our whining and still forgives us. Who still loves us enough that he sacrificed his own life so we could have the victory of heaven.

When we march behind that banner we can do anything....because we've already won. When I march with my LORD Jesus I can be a better husband. When I march with my LORD Jesus I can be a better worker. With this banner I can beat temptation, beat the devil, beat anything the world throws at me, because with Jesus, I already won. His victory is our victory and that's why his banner leads.

The LORD is my Banner, that is something we can proudly say with Moses. He saw a great victory in our lesson, and for us, his victory is just another great reminder of the victory Jesus gave us. The LORD my Banner leads, so we follow.

This last week we had our soccer camp over at Wyco Park. 3 out of the 4 nights we had over 90 kids....and I was amazed how well they behaved. The coaches probably think I'm crazy for saying that....because those kids could act crazy. But when I saw 35 5 to 7 year olds running in a straight line behind one coach, you have to admit, that's kind of incredible!

It really is incredible that usually, kids willingly listen and follow their parents or adults in charge. They recognize when someone is trying to help them, someone who is maybe stronger and knows more. So it just makes sense to follow.

If only we could get behind our Lord's banner with that kind of attitude. Maybe it's because of pride that we get in the habit of having to do everything on our own and only rely on ourselves, but our LORD really wants us to follow him as faithfully as a child.

Jesus even made a really strong statement about faith like a child when he said, "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." He made it clear that he loves to see us following him with complete trust, knowing that he really does take care of, really does know what he's doing, really does lead us to victory.

Moses showed faith like that at this battle. He could've thought he needed to be down there with the troops leading the way, because he was their great leader. But instead he climbed a mountain and raised his hands to God.....in prayer. When he did this he recognized where he needed his help to come from, and how powerful prayer really is. And God blessed it.

Prayer. What a great way we can also show *our* trust in our leader and banner. This past week I was letting a lot of things stress me out. I was getting frustrated by things that needed to happen here and things for next year. Then the other day I realized something. I hadn't prayed about any of it. So I did....and no they didn't all suddenly go away and fix themselves, but I did get a friend who came in and talked to me, pepped me up when I needed it. And I know it's because God gives us what we need.

There are so many different ways to follow our banner. Think about sports. How many stores and websites exist solely to sell sports teams' clothes and memorabilia. Everything under the sun can be plastered with your team's logo to show everyone who you follow. Your clothes, dishes, windows, cars....

It makes me wonder what we do to show what banner we follow in life. When people see us interact with our families and friends, can they tell what banner we follow? When they see how we dress, how we behave, is our Lord's banner in plain sight? Everything in the way we act, in the way we talk, in what we show is important to us should be like an enormous banner pointing the world to our Lord.

And the world needs to have the banner of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah wrote about what Jesus could do for the world when he said, "The Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious." The rest Jesus' victory gives us is something people desperately need. In a world full of crashing economies, unreliable politicians, dishonest famous coaches....people need to see the one thing that will never fail them, that will never lead them the wrong way. They need the banner of Jesus.

So let's plaster our lives with prayer and the kind of living which shows who we follow. That we follow the LORD is my Banner. Our Lord who led us to victory on the cross. Our Lord who leads us to victory every day. Amen.

Vicar Greg Hein