

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Ephesians 3:13-19  
September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018

*“So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.”*

A slight disclaimer, if you will. This sermon is a bit out of the ordinary. I’m going to tell you a story. The title of the story is a simple question: “Want a Donut?”

There was a certain professor of theology named Dr. Christianson who taught at a small private college in the western part of the United States. Dr. Christianson taught the required survey course in Christianity at this particular institution. Every student was required to take this course his or her freshman year regardless of his or her major.

Although Dr. Christianson tried hard to communicate the essence of the Gospel in class, he found that most of his students looked upon the course as nothing but required drudgery. Despite his best efforts, most of the students refused to take Christianity seriously. This year, Dr. Christianson had a special student named Steve. Steve was only a freshman, but was studying with the intent of going to the seminary for ministry. Steve was popular, he was well liked, and he was an imposing physical specimen. He was now the starting center on the school’s football team, and was the best student in the professor’s class.

One day, Dr. Christianson asked Steve to stay after class so he could talk with him. “How many push-ups can you do?” Steve said, “I do about 200 every night.” The professor remarked, “200, that is pretty impressive, Steve. Do you think you could do 300?” Steve, replied, “I don’t know... I’ve never done 300 at a time.” Dr. Christian said, “Do you think you could?” “Well,” said Steve, “I can try.” The professor said, “I need you to do 300 pushups in sets of 10. I have a class project in mind and I need you to do about 300 pushups in sets of ten for this to work. Can you do it? I need you to tell me you can do it.” Steve responded, “Well... I think I can... yeah, I can do it. You can count on me.” Dr. Christianson said, “Good! I need you to do this on Friday. Let me explain what I have in mind.”

Friday came and Steve got to class early and sat in the front of the room. When class started, the professor pulled out a big box of donuts. Now these weren’t the normal kinds of donuts, they were extra fancy big donuts with cream centers and frosting swirls. Ohhh, everyone got excited. It was Friday, the end of the week, and the last class of the day. They all wanted to tear into one of those amazing looking donuts. They were hoping to get an early start to the weekend with a big part in Dr. Christianson’s class.

Dr. Christianson went to the first girl in the row and asked, “Cynthia, do you want to have one of these delicious donuts?” “Oh yes,” said Cynthia. Dr. Christianson then turned to Steve and asked, “Steve, would you do ten pushups so that Cynthia can have a donut?” Steve said, “Sure, Doc.” And he jumped down from his desk to do a quick ten. Then Steve again sat in his desk. Dr. Christianson put a donut on Cynthia’s desk.

Dr. Christianson then moved on to Jim. “Jim, do you want a donut?” “Oh yes,” said Jim. “Steve, would you do ten pushups so Jim can have a donut?” Steve did ten pushups and Jim got his donut.

And so it went, down the first aisle, Steve did ten pushups for every person before they got their donut.

And now down the second aisle, until Dr. Christianson came to Scott. Scott was on the basketball team, and in as good of a condition as Steve. He was very popular and never lacking for female companionship. When the professor asked, “Scott, do you want a donut?” Scott’s reply was, “Well, yes but I will do my own pushups.” Dr. Christianson said, “No, Steve has to do them.” Scott replied, “Well, I don’t think I want a donut then.” Dr. Christianson shrugged his shoulders and then turned to Steve and asked, “Steve, would you please do ten pushups so Scott can have a donut that he doesn’t want?” With perfect obedience, Steve started to do ten pushups. Scott said, “HEY! I said I didn’t want one!” Dr. Christianson said, “Look, this is my classroom, my class, my desks, and these are my donuts. Just leave it on the desk if you don’t want it.” And he put a donut on Scott’s desk.

Now by this time, Steve had begun to slow down a little. Just stayed on the floor between sets because it took too much effort to be getting up and down. You could start to see a little perspiration coming out around his brow.

Dr. Christianson asked Jenny, “Jenny, do you want a donut?” Sternly, Jenny said, “No!” Then Dr. Christianson asked Steve, would you do ten more pushups so Jenny can have a donut that she doesn’t want?” Steve did ten, Jenny got a donut.

By now there was a growing sense of uneasiness that filled the room. The students were beginning to say “No” and there were all of these uneaten donuts on the desks. Steve also had to really put forth a lot of extra effort

to get through all ten pushups. There began to be a small pool of sweat on the floor beneath his face. His arms were beginning to quiver a bit. He was breathing very hard.

The Dr. Christianson came to Robert, the most outspoken unbeliever in the class. He told Robert that he wanted him to go down next to Steve so that he could make sure that Steve did every pushup perfectly – that he didn't cheat on any of them. Robert could hardly bear watching Steve do all those pushups for uneaten donuts.

During the class time, some students from other classes, hearing all the commotion, had wandered in and sat down on the steps along the radiators that ran down the sides of the old classroom. When the professor realized this, he did a quick count and saw that now there were 34 students in the room. He started to worry if Steve would be able to make it.

The professor went on to the next person and the next and the next. Near the end of that row, Steve was really having a rough time. He was taking a lot more time to complete each set. Steve asked, "Do I have to make my nose touch on each one?" Dr. Christianson thought for a moment and said, "Well, they're your pushups, Steve. You are in charge. You can do them any way that you want," and Dr. Christianson went on.

A few moments later, Jason, a recent transfer student, came to the room and was about to come in when all the student yelled in one voice, "No! Don't come in! Stay out!" Jason didn't know what was going on. Steve picked up his head and said, "No, let him come in." The professor said, "You realize if he comes in you will have to do ten pushups for him. Steve said, "Yes, let him come in. Give him a donut." The Professor then asked, "Steve, will you do ten pushups so Jason can have a donut?" Steve did ten pushups, slowly... and Jason, who was bewildered sat down in the classroom with his donut.

Dr. Christianson finished the fourth row and moved on to the students who came in and sat by the radiator. Steve's arms were visibly shaking by now as struggled mightily to raise his body against gravity. Sweat was everywhere under him, his face was red. There was not a sound in the classroom except for Steve's heavy breathing. And, there was not a dry eye in the room.

The very last two students in the room were young women, both cheerleaders, and very popular. Dr. Christianson went up to Linda, the second to last, and asked, "Linda, do you want a donut?" Linda said, very sadly, "No, thank you." Professor Christianson quietly asked, "Steve, would you do ten pushups so that Linda can have a donut she doesn't want?"

Grunting with effort, Steve did ten very slow pushups for Linda.

Then Dr. Christianson turned to the last girl, Susan. "Susan, do you want a donut?" Susan, with tears flowing down her face, began to cry, "Dr. Christianson, why can't I help him?" Dr. Christianson, with tears of his own said, "No, Steve has to do it alone. I have given him this task and charged him with seeing it through so that everyone has the opportunity for a donut whether they want it or not. You see, when I decided to have this party on the last day of class, I looked at my gradebook. Steve here is the only student with a perfect grade. Everyone else has failed a test, skipped class, or offered me inferior work. Steve said that the punishment for failed work in football is pushups. We made this deal for your sake."

As Steve very slowly finished his last pushup, with the understanding that he had accomplished all that was required of him, having done now 350 pushups, his arms buckled beneath him and he fell to the floor.

Dr. Christianson turned to the room and said, "And so it was, that our Savior Jesus Christ, on the cross, pleaded to the Father, *"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."* Jesus had accomplished, for your sake, everything that was required of him."

Such a story truly gives meaning to the words spoken by Jesus Himself, *"Greater love hath no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends."* And I wonder, if these words spoken by Jesus were on St. Paul's mind when he said to the Ephesians, *"So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory."* Paul suffered beatings and imprisonments for sake of the Gospel of Jesus. You see, Paul was truly a Christ-like example. So was Steve in that story. He gave, so his friends could get. Paul suffered, so that others might hear of what Jesus has done for them. We, the church, are put under scrutiny, are under attack, are called all sorts of unsavory things, and might even one day have to suffer worse, for the Christian faith.

Our Jesus did it for you. Our sins put us on the path of unrighteousness. In the gradebook of God based on the letter of the law, we have a failing grade... and we need Steve to do pushups... we need Jesus to pay our price. But thanks be to God, He did! In this life... in your family, at your school, at your work, be Steve. For the sake of the life to come, rely on what Jesus has done for you. He has won the victory. He has paid the price... the whole price... so that you can have so much more than a scrumptious donut... but rather eternal life in heaven with him. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.