In his book, “The Barbarian Way” Erwin McManus opens with a story about a Scottish noble named Robert the Bruce. The story goes that he died in 1329 at the age of 54. But shortly before his death, Robert the Bruce requested that his heart be removed from his body and taken on crusade by a worthy knight. One of his closest friends, James Douglas was at his bedside and accepted the responsibility. So the heart of Robert the Bruce was embalmed and placed in a small container that Douglas carried around his neck. In every battle that Douglas fought, he literally carried the heart of his king pressed against his chest.

In the early spring of 1330, Douglas sailed from Scotland to Granada, Spain, and engaged in a campaign against the Moors. In an ill-fated battle, Douglas found himself surrounded, and in this situation death was both certain and imminent. In that moment Douglas reached for the heart strapped around his neck, flung the heart into the enemy’s midst, and cried out, “Fight for the heart of your king!” One historian quoted Douglas as shouting, “Forward, brave heart, as ever thou were wont to do, and Douglas will follow his king’s heart or die!” The motto of the Douglas clan is even to this day simply, “Forward.”

McManus goes on to make this point. “The power of this story awakens within me a primal longing that I am convinced waits to be unleashed within everyone who is a follower of Christ. To belong to God is to belong to His heart. If we have responded to the call of Jesus to leave everything and follow Him, then there is a voice within us crying out, “Fight for the heart of your King!”

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to suffer and die. All along his journey to Jerusalem He had managed to attract many traveling companions. There were people that had heard him teach, seen Him do amazing miracles and were captivated by His message and miracles. In our western culture, Jesus would be labeled a resounding success. His ministry had attracted crowds of people. As he went along more and more people hopped on the Jesus bandwagon and went with him. Outside of the religious leaders of the day, most people liked Jesus and those that could, hitched a ride on his coattails. Another way of putting it, Jesus’ church was overflowing with people. He started with 12 and now he had managed to attract a large crowd. He was a resounding success, everyone wanted to be part of this new church led by this amazing preacher and teacher. But as they traveled together one day, Jesus does something truly astounding. He stops in the middle of the road, turns to the crowd and talks to them about the requirements for true, authentic discipleship. He laid it out plain and simply to these folks. I don’t imagine they liked what they heard. “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

I can hear the crowd murmuring. “Now just hold on a second Jesus. Did you really say hate my family, and even myself? Did you really say carry my own cross? Did you really say, give up everything I have? Jesus I was really enjoying the ride, why did you have to go and ruin everything with this kind of talk? Really, with this kind of a challenge. Tell me it ain’t so, Jesus.”

Jesus did mean what he said. Now he didn’t mean for the people to completely dislike their families and themselves, or have anger and hostility towards them. But he was saying that if there is a conflict between your devotion to me and devotion to your family or yourself, well then you better think twice about continuing this journey with me. Jesus was saying that if you really want to be my follower, well, are you prepared to suffer the same fate that I will suffer. That’s the part about carrying one’s cross. Are you willing to suffer and even die if necessary as my follower? He was also saying that if you want to be my follower then you must be willing to
say farewell to anything that you own. You have to detach yourself from all your possessions — you know, be willing to give up everything. That’s what Jesus was asking this crowd. I’d say that Jesus laid down some pretty hefty demands of discipleship. But he wasn’t looking for any tagalong’s or coattail riders. He was looking for real authentic followers. He wasn’t into attracting a crowd as a sign of importance or success. Jesus was looking for followers that were willing to count the cost and say yes.

So He gave two examples of counting the cost. First he talks about how a prudent person would not begin a project unless they are sure they can finish it. He also talked about how a king would not go to war unless he had enough soldiers to resist the opposing army. He would be wise enough to seek a peace treaty before suffering a great loss of life. What he might say today could be that He or she wouldn’t join a book or CD club without first making sure they could fulfill the obligations of membership. Or, one wouldn’t buy the house or the car unless they were sure they could make the payments until it was paid off or sold. Or, for some of us, one won’t agree to the Homeowner’s Covenant unless he or she is willing to uphold the rules and regulations in the covenant. You might say that Jesus was pointing out the fine print to this crowd of wanna be followers. The fine print said, “No one should step forward as a disciple without being willing to forsake everything for the sake of following Jesus. Understand that first and foremost what is required is all you have.

Jesus was saying that God would not have entered into His plan for the redemption of humankind without being prepared to go all the way. Jesus did not set his face towards Jerusalem without being prepared to face the sacrifice that would be required of him there. Jesus came to fight for the heart of His Father. His motto was “Forward to Jerusalem.” But he wasn’t willing to take along anyone who wasn’t willing to go all the way with Him. He wasn’t willing to take anyone whose heart wasn’t willing to fight for His heart.

When I think about the decision that the Confirmands are making today, I think about what they are really committing to do. They are making a decision to step out of the crowd and be a warrior for Jesus for the rest of their lives. This is not for the faint-hearted, but for the brave-hearted. Jesus calls this crowd of fans to make a decision. He is calling for total commitment. He is calling for these folks to consider if they are truly willing to go forward with Him, no matter the cost or sacrifices they might have to make. In essence he is asking them to leave behind their old way of life and learn a new way of life. All this requires is to attach themselves to Him above all other relationships and possessions. He says, “Are you willing to give them all up for me?” We aren’t told how many turned around and headed for home that day, like the rich young ruler did when Jesus told him to sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor, then come follow me, as what he needed to discover eternal life.

Do you ever think that there must be more to following Jesus than coming to church, going to a Bible study, putting some money in the plate, maybe even doing some mission work now and then or helping someone in need occasionally? Do you ever feel like you want more out of your walk with the Lord than maintaining the status quo? Is there a deeper longing burning in your bones just waiting to be released? Are you tired of having a civilized faith? Do you want more of a wild, untamed kind of faith that requires more out of you and more commitment then you think you can give, but will result in a fulfillment and excitement in your life than you ever thought possible? Do you want more out of your following of Jesus? I realize I might be speaking to only a few people this morning. Sadly I think many “Christians” are quite content to do the minimal. Many “Christians” are satisfied with a status quo life, trying to maintain a lifestyle that is conducive with our cultural values more than being a citizen of a new
country called the Kingdom of God. Folks, and especially Confirmands, I tell you today, **don’t settle for a status quo kind of faith.** Don’t settle for just attending church. Don’t settle for becoming a consumer Christian where it’s all about me and getting my spiritual needs met. Don’t settle for a mediocre kind of faith. Don’t become a nominal Christian – that is a Christian in name only. This morning I encourage the Confirmands to make this decision to be a Jesus-follower means something more than a status quo kind of Christianity that so many Christians have settled into. I say to all of us others; consider yourselves as part of the crowd that Jesus turns to and challenges to consider our commitment to Him. I ask, have you made your decision to follow Christ really mean something more than being a consumer Christian, a church attendee? I challenge all of us today to let God unleash the faith that lives inside of us so that we learn a new way of life and become new creations in Christ. I challenge all of us today to make a decision to become followers that are willing to go all the way, to go all out to fight for the heart of our King.

This week I received the magazine of the mission organization called Gospel for Asia. In it is a story about a man named Joseph.

At the age of 20, Joseph found himself standing beside the railroad tracks waiting to die. His life had become a bitter disappointment. He was addicted to smoking, alcohol and drugs. He heart was nothing but chaos and he had brought nothing but anxiety and tension to his family. So as he stood by that railroad track, he felt that it was best for him to end his life by stepping in front of a speeding train. Now Joseph had been brought up in a nominal Christian home. He had heard God’s Word plenty of times, but he had rejected it in favor of his own destructive desires. So as he waited for a train to come, so he could kill himself, a Bible verse came to mind from out of the past: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Then in the last second before his life was going to end he heard a voice speak to him: “This is not the end. Why do you want to finish your life? Your body is My temple; do not destroy it. I want to use you.”

Joseph knew that the answer to his problems didn’t lie in suicide. He returned home confused. About three months after this and still depressed a Christian co-worker shared the Gospel of Jesus’ love for him and reassured Joseph that Jesus could set him free of his addictions. Shortly after that Joseph attended an evangelistic meeting and the Holy Spirit used the preacher’s message to convict Joseph of his desperate need for forgiveness. That night he repented of his sin and gave his heart to Jesus. Joseph said, that “God touched me and set me free. A great joy and peace entered my heart. The devil had been ruling my life, but now I was completely changed. I started living for Christ and witnessing to my friends at work.”

It wasn’t long after that that he realized God was calling him into full-time mission service to share the Gospel with those who had never heard it. Joseph readily obeyed, leaving his job and enrolling in a three-year Bible school to prepare himself for ministry. It was during this time that the Lord put a specific burden on his heart for a totally unreached area of his native Maharashtra state in India.

After graduating from school, he went to his new mission field. He rented a small room and began his outreach work. He distributed tracts from house to house and shared the gospel with anyone who would listen. He felt led to visit every home in all the surrounding towns and villages. His goal was to contact 300 households – per day.

It was hard work. He rose early, traveled day after day across dusty plains, going to bed late at night. For the most part all he encountered was hardened hearts. People not only resisted his message but warned him not to come back. The local witchcraft in the area caused a steel
barrier of spiritual darkness in everyone’s lives. But Joseph pressed on. All that kept him going was his absolute certainty in God’s calling on his life.

Days and weeks went by with out a single response to Joseph’s message. His strength to carry on came from the many hours he spent at the top of mesa crying out to God. From the top of the mesa he could see the towns and villages off in the distance. He began to claim them for the Lord. He fasted for days, sometimes weeks at a time. He literally laid down his life for the souls the Lord had called him to reach. He faithfully continued his systematic outreach work, going from village to village.

But he faced a lot of opposition. Every door he knocked on closed. The first two years of his ministry were a severe test of Joseph’s resolve to remain true to his calling. Once some drunken men confronted him and threatened to beat him if he didn’t leave. Another time some local villagers grabbed his tracts and destroyed them. They warned him to stop preaching. Another time after conducting an open-air evangelistic meeting, a mob vented its wrath by stoning him. Another time he ventured into the most feared community of all. Before he knew it had been beaten and locked in a room. His abductors had planned to come back and kill him. But one villager helped him escape.

After almost two years of this, not even one heart was opened to his message. At this point he cried out to the Lord, “Send me some where else—anywhere.” But God said back, “Don’t pray for another place. I have put you in this place, and I will sustain you.” That was a turning point for Joseph as he decided to trust God’s promise. Slowly hearts began to respond to the Holy Spirit. Then he began to experience the joy of leading one person after another to faith in Christ. One year later he was pasturing a church of 35 new believers. And God continued to add to the number of those who were being saved. Joseph has planted 25 growing churches and another 28 mission stations, all where the gospel had been previously unknown. He pastors seven of those churches himself. Each church has more than 100 believers. He holds a service every day of the week. Even that most feared community of all that wanted to kill him now has a congregation of about 30 who gather every week to worship the living God.

The article ended with this quote from Joseph. “God gave me a vision to reach the lost despite persecution and stoning. I made a difficult decision. I will not turn from my ministry; I will serve the Lord whether I am hungry or poor or beaten or facing death. I will be faithful to the Lord no matter what.” A verse from Galatians at the beginning of this article summarizes Joseph’s life, “And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9).

Ultimately Joseph’s decision was to fight for the heart of his King. That meant coming to him in repentance, receiving His grace of forgiveness, saying yes to God’s call on his life, establishing a plan of attack to share the good news of Christ with lost people, seeking God through prayer and scripture as the most important part of his life, staying with his calling no matter how difficult it became or how much he felt like quitting. It meant obedience to Jesus, his Master. It meant being faithful no matter what. It meant not to accept a mediocre faith, but to fan into flame the burning in his bones, to learn a new way of life and let His passion for Jesus and all the people that Jesus loves rule his heart. For Joseph, making the decision to follow Christ is a decision to fight for the heart of His King. Eventually God provided the victories, as Joseph continues the fight.

When Jesus confronted that crowd on the way to Jerusalem, he was saying to the people, to be my follower know my heart, share in the things I am passionate about – things like love of all people, freedom for the oppressed, release from bondage, good news for the poor, healing of
the physically and spiritually sick, and forgiveness of sin for all. You see folks; the only way Joseph was able to keep moving forward was because he shared his Lord’s heart. He had personally experienced the heart of Jesus in his own conversion, and then by deepening his relationship with Jesus through committed prayer and scripture study. I believe this is the key to being able to truly say “Yes, Lord, I am willing to fight for your heart, no matter what.” It is knowing and experiencing the heart of our King.

When I attended a conference a couple of weeks ago, author and speaker Leonard Sweet made a statement that I have not been able to get off my mind. He was asked what he wanted people to say about him at the end of his life. He said, “After I die, I want people to remember me as someone who was crazy in love with Jesus.” When you’re crazy in love with someone a deep passion for that person is unleashed inside of you that will cause you to do all kinds of things that you wouldn’t normally do, just to let that person know you love them. When you are crazy in love with someone you speak so highly of that person and you are willing to talk to anyone about him or her. When you are crazy in love with a person you desire to know their heart, protect their heart, defend their heart, and advance their heart forward, no matter the cost to you. Parents, you will do that for your children. I hope spouses will do that for one another as well as good friends.

Friends, Jesus does that for you and I. He suffered and died for our hearts. He is crazy in love with you. Are you crazy in love with Him? If you are, then you will desire to let him unleash in you a faith that will require more out of you than you think you can give, but it will be a faith that brings your life more joy and fulfillment than you can possibly imagine. It may not be to enter full-time mission work, but Jesus needs people sharing the Gospel in all kinds of ways in all kinds of places like with your neighbors, with your coworkers, with your waiter or waitress, with the check out clerk, with the telemarketer, with whatever village of people He has placed within your eyesight, even your own family. Think of one person that you can pray for and claim for Jesus that doesn’t presently know Jesus. Pray everyday and pray fervently for that person. Be wide open to opportunities to share your faith with that person through word or deed.

Are you fed up with a civilized version of Christianity? Are you ready to step out of the crowd and go fight for the heart of your King? After all, he fought for your heart all the way to his death.

Many people in our society wear a cross necklace. Many people are cross wearers, not cross bearers. When I think about what symbol represents the heart of our King, a cross is without a doubt that symbol. The cross tells us of Christ’s love and grace that he has for all people. I like the idea of wearing a cross around our necks that hangs down over our heart. It reminds me that I am learning new way of life as a Christ follower in which my heart is learning to be attached to His heart, and only his heart above all other relationships and things. So this morning, one of the gifts the Confirmands will receive is a necklace. This necklace is in the shape of a shield with a cross imprinted on the shield. As each of them wears it, I encourage them to let it serve as a reminder of their decision to be His follower, who is called to fight for the heart of their King.

S. I. McMillen, in his book None of These Diseases, tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will
have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

Jesus turns and asks each of us, “**Will you be the one who follows?**” Don’t settle for a watered down faith. If you have responded to the call of Jesus to leave everything and follow Him, then the only appropriate response is to obey the voice within crying out, “Fight for the heart of your King! Forward, forward, wherever You take me or ask me to do.” Don’t settle, don’t settle. AMEN.