

**Jesus Challenges Us with *Come Follow Me***  
**January 22, 2023**

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church      Pastor Tyson Labuhn**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Challenges—each of us face different challenges. Sometimes they can seem daunting, especially to a young child trying to walk for the first time or to someone older who is trying to overcome yet another series of health issues. But challenges can also be enjoyable, especially when we overcome them. Because they test our ability to accomplish something that we never thought possible. And that was the case yesterday for some of our confirmation students who, while on their confirmation retreat, were challenged to completed an obstacle course. But some challenges can also test our ability to put our trust in God. As someone once said, the challenge of a man is not to put his trust in himself, but rather to place his trust in God. And really, this is the challenge of all Christians, to place more of our trust in God rather than in ourselves.

In last week's Gospel, you might recall that we heard how John the Baptist pointed out that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And the week before that, we heard how John was baptizing in the Jordan River, and to get John the Baptist to administer baptism, Jesus said, "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." But since that time, a whole year had taken place before our text for today begins. Herod had heard how John the Baptist had challenged him and others to repent of his sins. So, what did Herod do? He arrested John and put him into prison.

But that did not mean that the message stopped. Because Jesus, going into Galilee, came to live in Capernaum by sea, and

fulfilled the prophesy spoken by Isaiah: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death, on them a light has dawned”(v.15-16).

That is right. Jesus continued to share the message in an area full of people with both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, fulfilling Isaiah’s promise of a future deliverance for the Northern regions of Israel, challenging them to see the light of God’s salvation, as well as other non-Jewish believers who lived in the area. He preached to them saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Because, like many people today, they were comfortable living in the darkness of their sins. They did not believe in God’s Word, because they did not want to repent of their sins and live differently.

But thanks be to God that it was not everyone. Because as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother, Andrew. Now, you might recall in last week’s reading that Andrew—after John the Baptist saw Jesus and said, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”—was one of the disciples who had followed Jesus. And after he and the “other disciple” stayed the day with Jesus, Andrew went and found his brother Simon. He had said to Simon, “We have found the Messiah (which means Christ),” and brought him to Jesus. But in today’s Gospel, with John the Baptist in prison, Jesus decided to issue them a challenge. The challenge of giving up seemingly everything.

Simon Peter and Andrew were casting a net into the Sea of Galilee because they were fishermen. And as Jesus was walking by, He said to them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And after hearing it, they must have thought to themselves, “Am I going to follow Jesus, or am I going to continue fishing for fish?” It was a pivotal decision because it

would change their life. They would be giving up their business, their belongings, and their profession. But when they heard the call of Jesus, their hearts were changed. And, as our text tells us, immediately they followed Jesus.

Now, that is not all, because our text also tells us that going on from there, Jesus saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother, John. He challenged them too, and immediately they left their boat, to follow Jesus. They left everything behind, the nets that still needed mending, their father Zebedee, along with a family business. And those words, “Come, follow me,” would mean that their lives would never be the same.

They would be challenged and face difficulties and persecutions. But they would also encourage one another as brothers in Christ. And as they followed Jesus, Jesus led them out and instructed them how they would follow Him by example throughout Galilee. Teaching in synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. Because in the end, after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, they would be the ones to carry His message forward, that God’s Word might go out to the ends of the nations.

When was the last time you played follow the leader? While the world encourages us all to be leaders, Jesus challenges us in a different way. He says to us today, “Come, follow me.” So, why follow Jesus? He does not have much to offer in an earthly sense—maybe that is why so many hear the challenge of His invitation and say that they are too busy with their own lives. They do not make the time. They have other plans. Because Jesus just is not a priority in their lives. It seems to underscore what Jesus once said, “Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man does not have a place to lay His head” (Matthew 8:20). Even where Jesus grew up in Nazareth, His hometown, did not receive His ministry.

So, why follow someone like that during Epiphany or anytime throughout the year? Because there is a lot more to living than simply living here on earth. As we heard Isaiah say, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shone” (Isaiah 9:2). And in a later chapter, Isaiah goes on to say, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you” (Isaiah 60:1). None of us actually likes to be in the dark. Without light, we stumble in the darkness. We walk into doors or doorframes. But, as John once wrote, the Lord is our Light. He is the Light of the World (John 8:12).

And lovingly, our Lord shines upon us by His grace. His Spirit works faith in our lives that we might realize that following Him is a challenge, but it is also a privilege and an honor. As St. Paul once wrote, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth)” (Ephesians 5:8-9). And Jesus challenges us every day to “Come, follow me” to embody those things that are good, righteous, and true, even in a world that is not so.

You know, there is a story about a field covered with freshly fallen snow. A father and a son entered the field. As they walked across the field, the father did not pay attention where he walked, but his son, on the other hand, followed right behind him, making a special effort to step in his father’s footprints. After the two have crossed the field, even though there was only one set of tracks visible in the field, two had walked across it. Is not a life that follows Christ that way? In our daily walk, we follow Christ's example. Whether in times of suffering, sorrow or need, whether in times of health, joy, or abundance, if people in the future were to remember us, would they see one set of tracks that followed Christ? The world wants you to be your own, to be a distinctive leader, and not a follower, to be a

“disruptor” in all things, that you might bring attention to yourself, to influence others. But to what end, and for what purpose?

Jesus says to us, “Come, follow me.” And even St. Paul encourages us in this challenge. He writes, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” (Colossians 3:12-15).

That is our challenge as Christians who follow Him not just on a Sunday morning; to read, listen, and hear His Word that we might apply it each and every day; to believe it with all our heart, soul, and mind. “Come follow me” means taking up our cross, sharing His invitation, and encouraging each other along the way.

And while we might not exactly follow all the steps of Jesus to a death on the cross—because He has already done that for us—like the disciples who heard his call this morning, we are called to leave all worldliness behind and wholeheartedly follow His steps all the way to the gate of heaven. Jesus says to us, “Come, follow me,” that we might do His will, giving Him thanks and praise both now and always.

In Jesus Name, Amen.