

June 6, 2021 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX “Follow Me”

At the end of today’s Gospel, we read (Mark 3: <sup>32</sup>) There was a crowd sitting around Jesus, and someone said, “Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.” <sup>33</sup> Jesus replied, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” <sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those around him and said, “Look, these are my mother and brothers. <sup>35</sup> Anyone who does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” God’s will just might be summed in those two words of Jesus: “Follow me.” (Matthew 10:38, 16.24, 19.21)

This December, I will be celebrating my 50<sup>th</sup> year in ordained ministry. Half of those years were spent as a chaplain in health care settings. The last six years of that were with Peterson Hospice in Kerrville. I had an average of 16 patients at hospice that I was to provide pastoral care for. Every patient is a unique person. As I begin a relationship, I ask two questions. Are they at peace with God? Secondly, is there anyone you need to forgive?

To follow Jesus is to be at peace with God. It is pure gift. Paul said, we are saved by grace through faith as a gift of God (Eph.2:8); to follow Jesus is to forgive others as He has forgiven you. I could ask each of you those two questions but I would rather you ask them of yourselves. Ask yourself if you are at peace with God. Ask yourself if there is anyone you need to forgive.

When I asked those questions of the great variety of people who go through that hospice program, who are terminally ill, there are a variety of answers. Many say they are at peace and feel no need to forgive anyone. Some say they don’t believe in God or an afterlife. I might challenge them while working to respect them. Paul calls it “speaking the truth in love.” I might say, Since, we are all going to die someday, we will discover either that there is a God you never believed in or trusted, or, you won’t know anything.” I might then continue to say, “But I believe that you are more than an intelligent animal, that you have a spirit that will go on.

You can wait and see or not or you can try to get to know the Lord who sent His Son to die for you and who offers us forgiveness of sins.” The person might say that they don’t believe in sins and I might counter by saying, “Then use the word, ‘flaws.’” They might tell me that their highest concern was for themselves and their enjoyment of life. That was their mission. They might ask: “Where does it say that

I'm supposed to be on someone else's mission? I did enough of that in the military." I might ask if that person was baptized and if so, died through the baptism and rose with Christ as He rose from the tomb. So, when Jesus says, "Follow me," you need to tune in to his mission for you. If you do, you will never be happier. Some seek only their own pleasure in experiences or material goods. But, it's a dead end.

Some seek God and may spend a whole lifetime in church as an active member and still be seeking God. To take the next step is to give up control you think you might have. That step is becoming a disciple. A disciple spends time getting to know Jesus as a person. The more time you spend in scripture with an open mind and heart, it will teach you about Jesus and draw love right out of your heart. Think of that song, "*Softly and Tenderly* Jesus is calling, calling O sinner, come home." To spend time in prayer as well as situational awareness allows you to know Him.

Soldiers, law enforcement and survivalist speak of situational awareness as being aware at all times of what is going on around you, sensitive to danger. Situational awareness, as I am using it, has to do with being aware of what is going on around you so that you can be a presence of Christ to that person or situation. Jesus defined himself as being One among you who is a servant. That comes across strongly as He washes His disciples' feet. There is a vast difference between asking the question: what can you do for me? Or what can I do for you? Luther would say that we are called, gathered and enlightened in the one true faith. That call brings us back to where Jesus says, "Follow me."

One man put it this way: I used to think of God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there, sort of like a president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I didn't really know Him.

But later on, when I met Jesus, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Jesus was in the back helping me pedal. I didn't know just when it was He suggested we change, but life has not been the same since I took the back-seat to Jesus, my Lord. He makes life exciting. When I had control, I thought I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable. It was the shortest distance between two points.

But when He took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places and at break-through speeds; it was all I could do to hang on! Even though it often looked like madness, He said, “Pedal!” I was worried and anxious and asked, “Where are you taking me?” He laughed and didn’t answer and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into adventure. And when I’d say, “I’m scared”, He’d lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey, our journey, my Lord’s and mine. And we were off again. He said, “Give the gifts away; they’re extra baggage, too much weight.” So, I did, to the people we met, and I found in giving I received, and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He’d wreck it, but He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, jump to clear high rocks, fly to shorten scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I’m beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus.

And when I’m sure I just can’t do any more, He just smiles and says... “Pedal.”

As I am peddling, one of the important things that helps me feel close to God is Christian music. When I’m deeply aware of His presence, there are often tears in my eyes and my chest is tight. That’s just me. Each of us has his or her own way to tune in to God’s presence, be open and be willing to be vulnerable like the tandem bike where He says simply, “Pedal.” So, ask yourself if you are at peace with God. Then, ask yourself if there is anyone you need to forgive. If you need help with that, pray and you can also talk to me. Another old hymn goes, “*Just a Closer Walk with Thee*, grant it Jesus is my plea. Let that be your plea as we follow Him. Amen