



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Southwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly

Lay Led Worship

“Follow Me” Sermon by Bishop Jon V. Anderson

April 18, 2010

Grace to you and peace, sisters and brothers in God's gracious call to follow Jesus our Lord. Amen.

In your life who did you follow? Did you follow your father or grandfather around? Did you follow an older brother who blazed a trail for you? Did you follow the example of your mother or grandmother, who showed you how to navigate the work of life? Or was it an older neighbor who you followed around and learned important skills, like how to play cards in the back of the bus? Maybe it was a cousin? Maybe it was a teacher? Maybe it was your boss? Maybe it was a friend? Who you follow matters. It really matters.

The disciples are lost again in today's Gospel lesson. As you know, like us, they are more often “duh-ciples” rather than the perfect Christians we imagine. They are not sure what to do after the crucifixion. They are even more unsure of what to do after the resurrection. Peter is fishing with the other disciples in the aftermath. Even though their world has been turned upside down they are trying to return to normal. I find great comfort in their confusion in the times I am not sure what to do as I seek to be faithful.

We gather at our synod assembly this weekend, remembering and knowing that most of God's church is gathering in congregations across our synod. It has been a challenging year in a variety of ways and at times we have been lost as well. I don't know the particular story of your congregation, but I do know the struggles many have had with financial challenges. I also know that while some are thankful for the decision of our churchwide assembly, many have struggled with those decisions. I lament we have lost congregations from our fellowship in the past year. I lament that we have had too many congregations get lost in conflict. I lament that we as a whole have lost focus in the past year as we have reacted and responded to the issues in our church body. That is why on this weekend we gather in assembly, this lesson is so important for us. We need to hear his call to disciples then and Christ followers now. It is time to hear Christ Jesus gracious command and invitation. “Follow me.”

Usually when I read the Bible I focus on what I think the text is calling me to do. That is not a bad thing to do, but it is even more important to watch what God is up to. In today's text God is working. Our mysterious, awesome, powerful, gracious God works in and through Jesus our Lord. Watch what God is doing in our lesson.....

Jesus shows up, pursuing his disciples. How could they fall asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane? How could they go back to life as normal when Jesus had been raised from the dead? What were they thinking? Maybe Peter was trying to forget the rooster crowing. Maybe their emotional and spiritual fuses were all blown. God keeps pursuing you and me, even when we don't get it. It is amazing grace.

God works with all kinds of people. I have thought that often this year as I travel to meetings full of sadness and questions and anger. Like Paul in the first lesson, at times we persecute Jesus and the community that carries his name as we act out in our brokenness. Other times we are like Ananias and don't want to go where God needs us to go especially to visit someone who has attacked us. And yet, God finds ways to work through our rebellion whatever form it takes. Sometimes he has to knock us off our high horse. Other times he has to persuade us that God actually knows what God is doing as we watch the scales fall from people's eyes. You never know how God will use people like you and me.

Jesus also knows where to fish. God knows how to snag us and drag us in a net that will never break into his kingdom and grace. We keep trying to do it on our own and keep fishing where we always have as God's people. You know, "We've never done it that way before." But Jesus catches us and drowns us in our baptisms....so that we might be raised to new life. Jesus sent his disciples and sends us to fish in new ways, new places and for new people. When we fish the places God sends us to fish, we are stunned with the results...and then we recognize the presence and power of our resurrected Lord...in our midst.

[If there is communion use this paragraph.]

Jesus feeds us, like he fed the disciples at the last breakfast. God is working to feed us in the meal we will share in a few minutes. It is a meal of God's grace. It is a meal of God's presence. It is a meal of forgiveness. It is a meal of God's kingdom. It is a meal of the community that gathers to remember and be remembered in the sharing of the bread and wine. ..his body and blood. It is amazing grace that nourishes us.

[If there is not communion, use this paragraph.]

Jesus feeds us, like he fed the disciples at the last breakfast. God also feed us in the Lord Supper that we have shared so many times. It is a meal of God's grace. It is a meal of God's presence. It is a meal of forgiveness. It is a meal of God's kingdom. It is a meal of the community that gathers to remember and be remembered in the sharing of the bread and wine. ..his body and blood. It is amazing grace that nourishes us.

We often focus on Peter when Jesus keeps asking him if he loves him, but I invite you to keep focusing on what God is doing as he shows us his love through the resurrected Jesus. He sends his son to reinstate and restore Peter and all of us. As he asks these three questions, in three steps he undoes the threefold denial and betrayal. He reclaims Peter. By God's grace, God comes after us in all of our brokenness. He undoes our mistakes, wipes away our sin, and reclaims us in ways we could never deserve.

Not only does God reclaim Peter and and reclaim you and me....but then in a stunning transformation God sends Peter to feed the lambs and the sheep of our Lord's sheepfold. Jesus keeps asking us the question, "Do you love me?" Each time the question keeps eating into us. For we know how we often we fail to love and instead rebel. We know how often we love other things than our Lord and God. Yet, God will not give up on Peter and will not give up on you and me. Instead God commissions us to feed his lambs....feed his sheep...feed and love his children. God will do God's work....and use our hands in ways we notice and mostly in ways we never comprehend.

God sent Jesus to follow his will and invites us to follow him. Often as we are called and sent, we go to places we do not want to go. We plan. God laughs. The trouble with our spiritual searching is that it normally leads where we want to go. For Peter and the other disciples, God surprises them and sends them where God needs them to be. Don't be afraid.

God sent Jesus to give us someone to follow. It is in his hands we trust; his hands which healed and forgave; his hands which raise people from the dead; his hands that were torn as he died; his hands that were healed in God's resurrecting grace.

It is God's work we trust that sets us free to use our hands to the glory of God and to love. Jesus says, "Follow me." It is a command....one that we resist at times. "Follow me!" It is also a promising invitation. God would like us to follow. Jesus calls us to follow. By God's grace we can and will follow our Lord as we gather today and as we hear him calling us back into our world and our every day lives so that we can feed and love his sheep.

+ Pr. Jon Anderson
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