

## Follow Me

John 21:1-19, Easter Sunday I

April 7, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....Contrary to popular belief, it is not possible to be a confessing Christian, yet live an openly wicked life without confessing sin. We are either for Christ or against Him, and there is no in-between. This means also we either have the free and full forgiveness of sins through Christ, which faith alone believes, or we have no forgiveness at all because we do not believe. All that God has done and accomplished by the cross can only be believed or not believed. Also Jesus said, "He that is not with Me is against Me" and "No man can serve two masters."

To put this another way, believers confess their sins and unbelievers do not. Today then we have again the blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion. How do we approach this Holy Table, provided and given us by the Lord? Do we approach with penitent hearts confessing our sins, or do we give Him lip service with the intent of continuing in our sins? In our lesson today we remember Peter had denied his Lord three times, and we likewise have Peter three times confessing His love for Christ. Peter's love for Christ comes from Christ's FIRST LOVE for Peter by the cross. Peter LOVED CHRIST, because Peter already knew Christ had forgiven Peter. We see also in our lesson Christ feeding His disciples a morning meal of fish and bread already prepared for them when they reach the shore. Isn't there a comparison with this Holy Meal Christ Himself has placed upon our altar today, in Holy Communion? When we approach this Lord's Table then today, let us remember Proverbs 28:13. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy." While it is more than evident we Christians sin continually throughout our life, it is Christ's love for us through the cross, that again and again cause us to approach this Lord's Supper by confessing our sins and saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Those who confess their sins here truly will find mercy, but finding such mercy let us be sure to forsake our sins. As Jesus said to Peter, so Jesus says to us, "Follow Me."

I. The great catch of the Fishers of Men. The Bible says of the first two times Jesus showed Himself alive to the disciples, "When the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you." Christ then in His human nature still had His same human body which was crucified on the cross, but His body was now glorified, namely Christ now fully used His divine nature connected to His human nature. This is how His body passed through the rock door at the tomb, or the doors to the closed room. In like manner Christ is always with us today in flesh and blood, His continual presence with us should be of great comfort to our soul - yet we see Him by faith alone, for we walk by faith and not sight.

As for those 40 days before the resurrection and ascension, we see the disciples didn't waste their time or talents sitting around waiting for Jesus' to tell them what to do. They employed themselves in doing good, namely catching fish to make money for their families. That is also why every man should work hard to put bread on the table for family. Ephesians four tells us, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." From Galatians six we also learn that by our labors we support those pastors who teach the good Word of God. It says, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate [or provide] unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Think of how much money we spend on car payments, cable TV, beer, entertainment, or 15% to a waitress, and what do we have at the end to give to church? Usually it is our leftovers. More often than not we do not give our firstfruits of faith. When the apostle Paul was raising money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem, Paul instructed the Corinthians, "Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him." This essentially means when you first receive your paycheck, before you pay all your other bills, set aside for the Lord your contribution to church first. This was really the Apostle Paul's advice, but not a commandment. When we give to the Lord the right way, we freely give remembering Jesus gave all for us on the cross. Therefore whatever you give is your business, but simply give to God your firstfruits in faith.

As for those disciples who worked hard all night yet "caught nothing", this seems to be our present day. When we work so hard but it is still hard to make ends meet, God is testing and trying us. By such God desires that we at all times acknowledge He is always the ONE who gives us each day our daily bread for we cannot feed ourselves. Our hands work, yes, but God alone feeds and clothes us not by our merits, but the merits of Jesus Christ. This then is the meaning of our prayer "Give us this day our daily bread." Luther explains, "God gives daily bread indeed without our prayer, also to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."

It is quite fitting then, when the disciples labored all night yet caught nothing, Jesus said, "Children have ye any meat?" Because Jesus is God Almighty, He now gathers together a large number of fish on the other side, "and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." After this great miracle John is the first to recognize Jesus - NOT BY SIGHT BUT BY FAITH. Faith alone sees all these gifts we have, even our daily bread comes from God's gracious hand alone. IT IS THE LORD. Can we ever thank Him enough?

Knowing the Lord, Peter "girt his fisher's coat unto Him, (for he was naked, and did cast himself into the sea", swimming for shore. This fisher's coat was "presumably a linen blouse, the ordinary working garment, worn outside of

the shirt" (Ylvisaker, pg. 775). Of course Peter was not fully naked, but being in the presence of close friends, he had a linen cloth covering the essentials. The Greek word behind "naked" here means either relatively or absolutely. Proof for this is Mark 14:51-52 which uses the same Greek word twice. It says, "And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about *his naked body*; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked." It was out of reverence then for Christ Peter covered himself better with the fisher's coat, and in like manner we come to church dressed in a modest and respectful way. When we dress modestly on the outside, such reflects the hidden man of the heart, the "meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." You could say the new man within us who loves Jesus, causes us to dress in a meek and humble way. Likewise if we confess our sins and forsake them, believing in Christ, we will not be found naked in our sins on Judgment Day. Christ is our righteous dress.

## II. We follow Christ by feeding His sheep and lambs.

After the disciples eat their meal with Christ, Jesus speaks directly to Peter in front of the others. Do you love me Peter? Now what would we do if Jesus asked us the same thing? Jesus knows all things; every word spoken by our unclean lips, every sinful and perverse thought, and Jesus knows everything our hands have touched which was forbidden. Also if Jesus wanted to, He could write a long list of our sins on a chalkboard, so all in our congregation here could read with their own eyes everything we have done.

But Jesus doesn't do that does He? Instead we read a long list of the punishments and sufferings He endured in payment for our sins. "He suffered, died, and was buried, but He rose again the third day." There are only two ways to see Christ in those words. You either see Him with the eyes of faith, as your Lord and Savior, whose blood alone declares you clean, or you see Him in unbelief as nothing at all. In like manner, we either confess with Peter that we are a threefold denier of Christ by thought, word, and deed, or we confess nothing at all, denying our denial. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy."

As for the first question, "Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, loveth thou Me more than these?"...whereas before Peter had bragged before the disciples he would never deny Christ, Peter knew better now, and so should we. Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before the fall. Now its different. Humble Peter quietly says before the others, "Yea Lord, Thou knowest that I have loved Thee." Jesus now says "Feed My lambs". No longer will Peter chase parents and children away from Jesus, but now Peter will suffer the little children to come to Jesus and have them baptized. In like manner today we show our love for Jesus by teaching our children the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus died to save the children just as much as the adults. Feed My sheep.

As for the second question, "Do you love Me Peter" and the same answer by Peter, Jesus now says "Feed My sheep." Jesus now is restoring Peter to the Office of Apostle before the other six disciples. Knowing the love of Christ, Peter was now to feed the flock of God, the sheep, the adults for whom Christ died. Rightly called pastors today are to do the same thing, remembering each believer is precious in God's sight. We are to give you the best food we can, the purest and most free Gospel which declares the filthiest sinner clean. The Gospel should predominate in all evangelical preaching. And so if I'm doing my job correctly, every Sunday in church two things should happen when you hear a sermon: inwardly you should be convicted you are a sinner no better the Peter or any other disciple (by thought, word, and deed), yet by the grace of God given you in Christ Jesus, God forgave you all your sins 2000 years ago via the cross, in, by, and through the blood of Christ. "Give and shed for you for the remission of sins."

As for the third question and answer, naturally Peter was grieved in his heart. Just as sometimes the smallest thing in our life brings to memory a past sin, so Peter's threefold denial rushes back to his memory. "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto Him *Feed My sheep*." Jesus was not being cruel to Peter here, but both wise and gracious. In spite of Peter's sins, Christ was Peter to labor in his vineyard and feed His sheep. Peter's confession then is our confession today, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Finally beloved, even if somehow all your sins were indeed written on a chalkboard for all the world to see, when the Gospel is preached, what happens to your sins on that chalkboard? You see Jesus Himself walking up to that chalkboard, and you see Jesus Himself erasing the entire list of your sins. Jesus then turns to you and says, "I don't see your sins anymore. I can't remember them. They are gone, vanished from My sight. Therefore children, I don't want you to see your sins anymore either. Follow Me." Amen.