

John 21:1-19
"Follow Me"
Third Sunday of Easter

April 9/10, 2016
Our Redeemer Lutheran
Vicar Peter Adelsen

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

One evening at a mission station in the Belgian Congo, a converted native prayed, "*Lord Jesus, Thou art the needle, and I am the cotton.*"

To the missionary, this seemed to be strange language, and so he asked the man what he meant by his unusual words.

It turned out that the native had visited the mission school that day and watched the girls sewing.

That caught that man's attention and caused him to think.

What interested him the most was that the thread always followed the needle.

In that same way, he wanted to follow Jesus wherever He led.

[Religious Freedom]

Do you follow Jesus wherever He leads? Do you ever go off His path?

So much of us are affected by the prevailing culture. Even if we believe that television, magazines and movies have no influence on our opinions – we are fooling ourselves.

If we keep hearing a certain point of view over and over again, we eventually end up believing in it. Even if, from the very beginning of the argument, we were in complete disagreement. At our most basic level, we want to fit in. We want to get along.

Within the past five years, religious freedom in the United States has become a major political talking point.

As the prevailing culture has moved further and further away from acknowledging there is a God, that void has been replaced by secular humanism. Human reason is now trumping God's truth.

Recently, the governor of Georgia vetoed a religious freedom bill that would have *re-affirmed* the First Amendment's establishment clause, which protects religion.

What made this bill different from other religious freedom bills was that the Georgia bill only protected clergy, churches and faith-based organizations.

Yet, many businesses, actors and media outlets threatened to boycott the state, because the bill in their opinion was discriminatory against the gay community.

James Madison, the father of the federal Constitution, wrote the following on religious freedom in 1788:

“There is not a shadow of a right in the general government to intermeddle with religion. Its least interference with it would be a most flagrant usurpation. I can appeal to my uniform conduct on this subject, that I have warmly supported religious freedom.”¹

There are many people who publically confess to be followers of Christ every Sunday and yet do not live out their lives according to that proclamation.

Do *you* fear, love, and trust in God above all things?

[Do you love me?]

In today’s Gospel lesson, the Apostle John through inspiration recounts what the resurrected Jesus Christ asked Peter following the catch of 153 fish.

Jesus asked Peter, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”** (John 21:15)

So, what is Jesus meaning by the phrase “*more than these*”?

Jesus is asking Peter, “Do you love me more than worldly pleasures: food, possessions, friends and family? And, are you prepared to lose it all for my sake?”

Peter quickly responds, **“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”** Jesus replies, **“Feed my lambs.”**

Jesus, again asks Peter that question, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”**

This is Jesus asking, “Do you *really* love me more?”

Peter responds, **“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”**

Jesus replies, **“Tend my sheep.”**

Jesus then asks Peter a third time, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”**

This is as if Jesus is saying, “Do you love me even unto death?”

¹ James Madison, *James Madison: Writings* (The Library of America, Penguin: New York: 1999), 382.

As you could imagine, Peter was perplexed. Why is Jesus asking the same question? Peter is probably thinking, “I just answered that question – twice.”

Peter replies, ***“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”***

Jesus then says, ***“Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go... Follow me.”***

Throughout this conversation, Jesus has forgiven Peter for denying Him three times following His arrest. Jesus has restored Peter for service to Him and to His flock.

We, too, may want to deny Jesus when we are questioned by authorities. If your freedom depended upon denying Jesus to keep it – what would you do?

[Bonhoeffer]

Back in 1938, there was much indecision among the young pastors of an independent Lutheran church body in Germany.

You see, those pastors in the Confessing Church were considered “illegal” because they refused to join the Nazi-run national church.

The Nazi government pressured these pastors to apply for legal status within the national church.

Many of these pastors were beginning to feel guilty, since they were a part of a separate church body.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the founders of the Confessing Church, wrote letters to each of the Confessing Church pastors to reassure them that they are bound to Jesus Christ and not to the government.

Bonhoeffer wrote:²

“Only Holy Scripture can guide our reflections aright and give us utter joy and confidence...”

“The church of Jesus Christ can only be truly one where the one faith corresponds to the one Lord and at present there is only one place where this is, and has been, the case...”

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (HarperCollins: New York, 1995), 168-171.

“As soon as the church abandons (Christian doctrine and is controlled by the State), it must become a sect; for in so doing it separates itself from the one true Christian church.”*

Bonhoeffer was living out Jesus’ question to Peter: **“Do you love me?”**

He understood that he could *only* serve one Lord.

Are we serving Jesus Christ or the government?

Bonhoeffer believed *only* in the true Lord Jesus Christ. He feared, loved, and trusted *only* in Jesus – even unto death.

[Lose everything?]

The Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul and Dietrich Bonhoeffer – to name a few – faced martyrdom in defense of Jesus’ good news.

So, do you love Jesus? Are you willing to lose everything for the sake of Jesus?

Keep in mind, you are only losing everything that belongs to this world. You are gaining salvation and life everlasting.

Jesus Christ died for us. He defeated sin, death and the devil for us. He rose for us to grant us life everlasting in the new heaven and the new earth.

All we have to do is to respond to Jesus when He says, **“Follow me”** and to believe in Him and trust in His promises. Amen!

Now, let us make a joyful noise unto the Lord! Amen!

*The decisions at Dahlem.