



**THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
JANUARY 17, 2020
JOHN 1: 43-51
“FOLLOWING OR FAKING IT?”**

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”

SERMON

A few short weeks ago, we celebrated Christmas and the birth of the Christ child. I love that we still have our trees, lights, and garlands up.

At Christmas we recall the words of the prophet Isaiah, “for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.”

We sang carols with phrases such as “hail the heaven-born prince of peace” and “peace to all the earth.” Near the end of every Christmas candlelight service, while holding candles that bathe the sanctuary in warm light, we sing the words of silent night, “sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace....”

When the biographer of Mahatma Gandhi visited his ashram in 1942, he noticed there was “only one decoration on the mud walls of his hut: a black and white print of Jesus Christ with the inscription ‘here is our peace.’”



The revelation from God is that Christ is our peace. Jesus is the man of peace. If we are his followers, then we will be people of peace.

Again, the prophet Isaiah speaks of the come-to-earth Christ: “he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

Peter echoes these words in his new testament letter, “when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. “

And what did Jesus, this prince of peace, say to his first disciples?

He did not say, “worship me.”

He did not say, “I value your opinion. Let’s talk about it.”

The word of God reads, “finding Philip, he said to him, “follow me.”
If we identify as Christian, then Jesus says to you and me, “follow me.”

Just so there is no confusion, the word “follow” means “to move in the same direction.”

Just so we clear up any misconceptions, “to follow” means to “be subservient to.”

Just so we do not get into a useless exchange of opinions, “to follow” means “to keep up with mentally, to comprehend.”

This definition resonates with St. Paul who instructs us to, “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Leaders lead. Followers follow.

Be honest with yourself: how are you doing in following Jesus?

Look at yourself: how are you doing in putting on the mind of Christ?

If we are about following Jesus and putting on the mind of Christ, it is not about a matter of right belief.

It is a matter of right practice.

How do we see through his eyes?

How do we feel through his heart?

How do we learn to respond to the world around us with his perspective?



There's a serious problem here. If we do not follow Jesus; if Jesus is not our leader; nature abhors a vacuum.

And so, if not Jesus, then it will be someone else.

If not Jesus Christ, we fall for a political leader and put that person on a pedestal. That person will become the purveyor of truth for us even if the leader's truth are lies.

If not Jesus Christ, then we fall for some ism: socialism, nationalism, globalism, hedonism, egoism, liberalism, conservatism, qanonism, extremism, militarism. You name it, we fall for it.

If not Jesus, then we will be led by a political party, a point of view, or a particular ideology...

Jesus Christ does not mention any ism. He comes preaching about the reality of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom is a metaphor for a state of consciousness—a state of awareness formed by kingdom values. It is a new way of looking at the world. Following Jesus brings about a transformation that turns the world into a different place.

A world where Jesus is the prince of peace.

He is the prince of peace, but he is not passive. He walked into the presence of his enemies. He spoke the truth. And he said the truth will set us free. He hung out with the wrong crowd. He healed at the wrong time, visited the wrong places. His nonviolence was active, provocative, public, daring and dangerous.

The values of Jesus Christ and the person of Christ become the measure by which we evaluate all values and by which we evaluate ourselves.

The spiritual question is: does our life give any evidence that we are following the prince of peace?

Saint Paul lists the fruits of the spirit of the risen Christ: love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, self-control and peace.

Are you and I being formed by the prince of peace and the gifts of his spirit?

If not, then we come to church and worship him, leave church unchanged, and go out into the world and do whatever we want. A totally painless and pointless exercise.

It drives me nuts that often the reigning value in the church is being nice. I get in trouble all the time because I do not go along to get along. Nice drives me nuts.

Jesus was and is many things, but nice is not one of them.

The truth will set you free, but first it makes you miserable. And that's not nice.



The truth of Jesus first makes us miserable because, in following Jesus, we get face-to-face with how little we understand the kingdom of God values.

Jesus was so in tune with the kingdom of God that he told the religious leaders of his day, “the whores are streaming into the kingdom of God before you.” Today Jesus would say that to our pope and our bishops and our priests/pastors who are all good boy and girls and so very nice.

If we follow Jesus Christ and put on the mind of Christ, then we can, through kingdom values, evaluate what happened in Washington, dc last week.

And I can hear everyone watching taking a collective breath.
Uh, oh, Pastor Scott is about to step in it again.

If we are followers of Jesus, we have no choice but to condemn the actions last week in Washington dc.

Please note I did not say anything about condemning the people who carried out the actions.
Sadly, they have followed someone other than Jesus. Someone who has terribly led them astray.

In saying this, I am not making any kind of political statement. I am neither a liberal or a conservative.

I am an expansive Lutheran Jesus Christ follower.

Because the deeper we go in following Jesus, the more expansive our world becomes.
We find there are more and more people we include in our world. We find commonality with more and more people.

We connect with people who are different than we are.

We are open and curious. We want to know what make millennials tick. We want to understand where Christian faith and Islam connect.

We want to help those who are struggling because we know what it means to struggle.
Our world becomes filled with the diversity of the world: different colors, different backgrounds.

We want to understand the woman who screamed, “you ruined my children’s lives” at a reporter.

We want to understand how people got pulled into such bizarre conspiracies as qanon.

How has their experience led them to create such a horrible world?

But no matter how hurt, angry, fed up, frightened we become, there is no way to follow the prince of peace and condone what happened in Washington.



Followers of the prince of peace do not defecate and urinate in the halls of congress. Followers of the prince of peace do not storm the capital.

When we reorder our lives by following Jesus and putting on the mind of Christ, we do not destroy, demean, damage, degrade, and debase the halls of congress. We do not roam the halls looking to hang mike pence and kill Nancy Pelosi.

If we follow Christ, we do not attempt to dominate and undermine the established processes of our constitution. We do not try and overturn an election.

Yes, many of the people of the protest have legitimate complaints. The middle class has been decimated. Millions have been cut out of the American dream. The poor do get poorer while the super rich have only added to their wealth during the pandemic. Meaningful and financially favorable work has all but disappeared for our citizens.

Richard Rohr cries out that “somewhere along the line, we lost the thread of the true story of our union, of wholeness, of God-with-us-and-us-for-each other.”

“throughout the first five centuries, people understood Christianity primarily as a way of life in the present,” not as a set of doctrines, not as a system of belief, not as a promise of salvation.

By following Jesus and his teachings, these first followers improved their lives, improved the lives of others, and offered a practical spiritual pathway.

Rather than being divisive, early Christianity was an inclusive faith that transformed lives and offered a way for women, children, slaves, and the poor to reorder their lives for the better.

Jesus sent his people into the world to make disciples—to form followers with a deep spirituality.

The sad truth is we can worship Jesus without doing the things he says to do. We can believe in him and still not follow him. We can attend church and never be transformed.

These are troubled times. We need believers to become followers who can truly and decisively say, “I follow Jesus.”

SERMON SONG

Jesus Gonna Be Here (Tom Waits)