

1 Peter 2:21-25 *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* ²² *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.* ²³ *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* ²⁴ *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.* ²⁵ *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

I've never been a great outdoorsman. I did spend countless hours outside throughout my entire childhood, but it was always spent playing sports or whatever else me and my brothers came up with. We rarely spent anytime outside participating in those activities that make one a great outdoorsman, you know like hunting and fishing and hiking and tracking—that just wasn't what we did. I didn't realize how deficient I was in these areas until I entered into college and all of my closest friends were great outdoorsmen—they grew up hunting and fishing and hiking and tracking. They could point to a non-descript spot on the ground and say, "That's a deer trail!" Or walking through some tall grass, they'd know exactly where the herd had lain that night.

I wanted to join in on the fun, so I took hunters safety class and got my license to start hunting with them; even still, I just couldn't keep up. They would point out a deer 100 yards out, and even though they were pointing out exactly where it was, my eyes just weren't trained to spot it like theirs were. I decided the best course of action for me, since I'd missed out on all those years of outdoors life, was to watch as many YouTube videos as I could to try to soak up all the information. I figured if the guy on the screen could point out to me what to look for, I could learn to identify the tracks just as well as my buddies. Well that never ended up working. Tracking requires years of hard work and dedication and experience, it's not just something you pick up from a video in ten minutes.

Today is "Good Shepherd Sunday." Every Christian knows that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. And every Christian knows that the believers are His sheep, who are supposed follow the Good Shepherd. What a lot of Christians don't realize is that following the tracks of the Good Shepherd doesn't come naturally—it's a skill. A skill that needs to be continually honed and practiced. With our text for today, the Apostle Peter's going to help us sharpen our spiritual tracking skill. This morning let's follow—**"The Tell-tale Tracks of the Good Shepherd" I. See where they led Him for you. II. See where they lead you for Him!**

In his first epistle, Peter is writing to his fellow Christians in the five provinces of Asia Minor. He knows these believers have been going through severe persecutions because of their faith. They're suffering, and he wants to encourage them—inspire them to keep up the good fight. So Peter points them to the best source of inspiration there is: Jesus Christ. He puts them on the track of the Good Shepherd.

He says in the final verse of our text: ***"For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*** Remember what your lives were like before you came to faith, Peter says. You were wandering around like sheep without a shepherd. Your lives were

filled with aimlessness and uncertainty. You lived for the pleasures of today, and tried not to think about tomorrow.

Well, most of us here at Immanuel don't have an idea of what it's like to live a life in total unbelief; many of us were first brought into God's family as little children in baptism. But every single one of us knows what it's like to wander astray. We've felt the temptation to wander, haven't we? We've felt that tug of our sinful flesh from time to time, urging us to stray from our Good Shepherd—to strike out on our own—to sample some of the sinful pleasures we see displayed around us just like candy in a store window. After all we reason, who's going to know if I keep a few dirty magazines hidden in the closet? What's the big deal if I get a little drunk once in a while? Who really cares if I indulge myself in a little gossip about my neighbor?

Well, the Lord cares. He cares very much when we abuse his grace and when we take foolish risks with our faith. In the prophet Ezekiel, actually from the verses just after our Old Testament reading, God says, ***"As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet?"*** What an abuse of God's grace! Just think! When a person comes to church or gathers around the word of God from home and is fed on the pure Gospel of God's mercy and forgiveness, and then goes out on Monday morning and proceeds to trample God's grace underfoot by leading a life that is openly un-Christian and unholy—that is abusing God's grace! That's what God was speaking about through Ezekiel!

And I don't know about you, but I see that failing all too often in my own sinful flesh. I know just what kind of guilt Paul was feeling when he cried, ***"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death!?"*** Who can give us relief for the guilt? Where can we find inspiration to help us keep going when the going is tough? Peter points us to the **Tell-tale Tracks of the Good shepherd**. See where they led Him for you, he says in v. 24 ***"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."***

The Milwaukee County Zoo that used to go to when I was growing up has footprints all around the park, Lion tracks, bear tracks, elephant tracks—they're painted on the pavement and they're obviously meant to be your guide, you follow the footprints and you'll find what you're looking for. None of us have been to a zoo recently, especially since they've all been closed for a while, but we have recently walked on trail of tracks, we following the footprints of our Savior. That was the journey we took this Lenten season. The Tell-tale tracks of our Savior that led from the home of Mary and Martha to the upper room in Jerusalem, where Jesus instituted the Lord's supper. Those Tell-tale tracks then led us to Gethsemane where Jesus sweated drops of blood as He prayed. From there the footprints led to the courtrooms of Caiaphas and Pontus Pilate, where he was humiliated, mocked and beaten. And from Pilate's court, we followed the now bloody footprints down the road of Sorrows and eventually those footprints ended at the dark hill of Golgatha, where those feet were lifted up and nailed to a cross as Jesus was Crucified.

All this He suffered—for you. Yes, for you! Those footprints are the tracks of Jesus' love for you. He knew that His death was the only way to guarantee your life; He knew that in order for you to go to heaven, He would have to endure hell on the cross. And He did it. He paid the price willingly. *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."* 1 Pet 8:18.

But I guess the question is, "Was that enough?" Could Jesus' march to the cross and suffering and death really pay for the sins of ever person who ever lived? Well God removed all reason for doubt when He answered that question on Easter Sunday with a resounding "Yes." When Jesus rose triumphant from the grave, that was the exclamation point of God declaring, "Yes, your guilt is gone. Your sin is blotted out, and your names have now been written in the book of life because of Christ."

This Easter season, there ought to be another question on our minds. If we've followed the agonizing progress of Jesus through Lent, and if we've seen his love for us on the cross, and if we've shared in the rejoicing of Christ's triumph on Easter—then the question we must ask is *"How shall I then live?"* How can I express my joy at knowing that I'll never have to bear the punishment for my sins? How can I say "Thank you, Jesus," for all that He's done for me?

Again, Peter points us to the **Tell-tale Tracks of the Good Shepherd**. *See where they led Him for you!* And also, *See where they now lead YOU for HIM*. Peter writes in the first verse of our text ***"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."*** Let's follow the footsteps of Christ, Peter says, not just with our eyes, but also with our feet! For the Christian, it's not enough to merely know where these footsteps go—for the love of our Good shepherd compels us to follow along as well.

I know we don't get snow down here, but perhaps you've seen this before or can at least picture it: up north where it snows often, it's not uncommon when a fresh layer of snow is on the ground and dad will stomp out into the snow, and behind him his son follows trying to step directly in his dad's footprints. It's always funny to see, the small child stretching with all of his length, concentrating all his efforts on stepping in his dad's footprints and not making any of his own. It's funny, and it's also rather touching. Because that boy wants to be just like his dad, even walking in his tracks.

And that's Peter's point with us; to show belong to Christ, the best way to do it is to strive and to concentrate on walking in the footsteps of our Savior. What will our walk look like then? What were Jesus' tracks like? Well, as we read in v. 22 ***"He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."*** Jesus made His life an example to others. Though He was tempted, He never gave in because so many were depending on Him.

How many people are depending on you? The truth is—you *don't know!* You don't know which of your co-workers on the job are watching your life to see what it really means to be a Christian. You don't know which of your relatives are listening to your conversation, perhaps searching for answers to their most important questions. You parents: you might not realize just how closely your kids are watching you, trying to figure out whether faith in God really is the most important thing in life or not. In short, there may be a lot of people depending on your example. So don't be a closet

Christian—let your joy in the Good News show! ***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”***

How else are the footsteps of our Savior described? V. 23 says, ***“When he was reviled, he did not revile in return.”*** When the innocent Son of God was on the cross, He refused to curse even the treacherous Jews who were mocking His agony. Rather, he prayed for them! Walk in His footsteps. When you hear people cutting someone down, instead of joining in, why not put in a good word? When someone uses the Lord’s name in vain, why not tactfully let him know that the name of Jesus is something sacred to you? It may not make you popular, but I guarantee you’ll get their attention!

V. 23 goes on to say, ***“When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”*** Conflict and injustice are a part of everyone’s life. I think especially now, many of us are struggling with the idea of injustice and unfairness in our lives. But no one in history suffered more unfairly than Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus didn’t go around “getting even” with His enemies. He left it to His heavenly Father to settle the score. Walk in the footsteps of your Good Shepherd. Jesus Himself told His disciples, ***“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.”***

These are just a few of the ways that we can show our gratitude to God for everything he’s done for us. This is how you can say, ***“Thank you Lord. Thank you for enduring the crown of thorns and the cross. Thank you for the mansion in heaven, and for preparing it for when I arrive.”***

Now, I said at the beginning that I thought that by watching enough videos on hunting, I’d soon be able to go right along with my buddies just as well as they could—I was wrong. I’ve always been like that though; many times I’ve convinced myself that if I watch something be done enough times, I’ll be able to do it, whether it be some element of woodworking or playing guitar or throwing a certain pitch in baseball. And even though I could watch a video and then follow all the motions exactly as it was done by the professional, I’ve never been able to even come close to doing the job well, whatever it was.

Likewise, our attempts to imitate the life of our Savior will never be perfect. We are like the small child, trying desperately to follow in our father’s footprints. There will be failures as we struggle to stay within the footsteps of our Good Shepherd. Many times we will trip up and fall right on our faces in sin. But when we do, let’s rely on His forgiveness to pick us back up. And let’s continue to follow that trail anyways. And let’s do it with joy, because we’ve seen where those footsteps led Him for us, and by God’s grace, we’ll follow where they lead us for Him. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.