

5th Sunday of Easter May 15, 2022

FOLLOW IN CHRIST'S STEPS

1 Peter 2:21-25

Scripture Readings

Luke 24:13-35

1 Peter 1:17-21

Hymns

207, 194, 409, Worhsip Supplement 2000 #784 (TLH alternate 428)

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) unless otherwise noted

+ Christ Is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! +

FOLLOW IN CHRIST'S STEPS

- I. Commit Yourself to God
- II. Live for Righteousness

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Have you ever taken a hike through deep snow? If you've ever done it (especially without snow shoes) then you know that it's exhausting! During my high school years in Wisconsin my friends and I used to take winter hikes into the woods behind our campus. The walk down the hill and into the woods was not easy. Sometimes in the middle of winter the snow was knee deep, at other times it was even deeper. Needless to say, it didn't take long for us to get tired. On the way back, however, the walk was much easier. Why? Because we were able to walk in the footprints

we had made on our way down to the woods. Not only did it make finding our way through the woods and back to campus easy, we also didn't have to kick through all the snow again. We simply stepped on the packed-down snow where we had stepped before.

This is the picture that immediately comes to my mind when I read our sermon text. The apostle Peter tells us, “*you should follow His [Christ's] steps.*” (v. 22) The word for “**steps**” here in the Greek literally means *footprints* or *footsteps*. Think of our walk through this life as a trudging through deep snow in the woods. This walk can be tiring and it can be hard, but we want to **Follow in Christ's Steps** because we know that it is the best way and the right way to go. After all, the ultimate destination of following Christ's footsteps by faith is heaven itself.

Now, let's make sure we're perfectly clear: We don't earn heaven by walking in Christ's footsteps. He has already earned that for us by perfectly walking God's path of righteousness and making the full payment for all our sins on the cross. His death and resurrection now free us to **Follow in His Steps** out of loving thankfulness, with hearts and minds that have been enlightened by His Word to see that His way is the best way and the right way.

Following in Christ's Steps, however, is not always the easiest way. In fact, Peter tells us in the first verse of our text that the example that Christ left for us to follow is His **suffering**. More than that, in the verse just before our sermon text Peter talks about each individual Christian **suffering** patiently for doing good, “*But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called.*” (1 Peter 2:20-21) In other words, suffering, even when we do what is right, is part of our calling as Christians. As surely as we will share in Christ's glory in heaven, so we will also share in His sufferings here on earth when we **Follow in Christ's Steps**.

“But I don't like suffering! I don't like pain and sacrifice! I don't think this is a walk I want to be taking! I thought the Christian life was supposed to be filled with joy and peace.”

Oh, but it is filled with joy and peace! It is filled with joy and peace when we realize that the One who already trudged through the path of eternal suffering for us, is not only our perfect example to follow, but also our inspiration and our strength to walk in His steps.

How did Christ do it? How did He endure all that suffering for us—suffering that was not only unimaginably agonizing, but also completely undeserved? Peter tells us that He “*committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*” (v. 23), that is, He committed Himself into the hands of His Heavenly Father and trusted that His ways are right and best. By giving His will and His entire life over to His just and loving Heavenly Father, Jesus was able to patiently endure all the injustices and sufferings that bought our salvation. Peter reminds us in v. 22 that Jesus was innocent; He had “*committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.*” But, “*When He was reviled [insulted], did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten.*” (v. 23) He certainly could have retaliated. He could have answered the insults with fire from heaven. He could have exchanged the soldiers’ whippings and beatings with an unstoppable army of heavens angels to destroy His enemies. But He didn’t. He endured all the undeserved suffering because He trusted fully in God’s plan; a plan that eventually included Christ’s resurrection and exaltation to God’s throne in heaven and the salvation of our souls.

Think of how foreign this type of submissive attitude is to our natural way of thinking and to the attitude of the world around us. When we’ve been wronged we want retribution and satisfaction for our suffering, no matter what, even if it’s at the expense of our relationship with others. Our society lives by the motto, “I don’t get mad; I get even!” Is this what it means to **Follow in Christ’s Steps?** You can flip on the TV in the middle of the day and watch hours and hours of people taking each other to court and suing each other over some of the most ridiculous things. Sure, God has given us our government and our court systems as means of protecting and defending ourselves, but even the best courts can fail. Man’s justice is imperfect, and often our methods of retribution don’t really solve the problem or make things better.

How much better it is to **Follow in Christ's Steps** and **1. commit ourselves to God!** Leave all our sufferings and injustices in the hands of "***Him who judges righteously***" (v. 23), our all-powerful, loving Heavenly Father. With God's Holy Spirit living inside of us, we, like Jesus, can submit our attitudes, our will, and our entire lives into our Father's hands and trust completely in His perfect plan for our lives. The pathway that follows in the footsteps of Christ may not always be an easy one, but God has promised that it will always be the best one. It is the path that leads to the blessings and joys that God has planned for us to experience, as well as the sufferings and hardships that He allows to come our way to strengthen and refine our faith. We can always be assured that the pathways of Christ's footsteps always lead to our true good, and our eternal home in heaven. As children of God through faith, God has changed our hearts and our attitudes from being selfish and vengeful, to lives that are committed into the hands of God's justice. By faith we gladly pray, "***Not my will, but Yours be done!***" (Luke 22:42)

When Christ suffered hell for us and paid the price of His own life on the cross for us, He didn't just do it to be our perfect example of how to "**commit ourselves to the Lord.**" He didn't do it just to pay for all of our sins either! Peter reminds us in our text that Christ's suffering and death did even more for us! "***[Jesus] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.***" (v. 24) Jesus not only paid for all our sins by His death, but He also took all our sins upon Himself and crucified them with Him on the cross. Our sins and sin's power over us died when Christ was crucified. If something is dead it no longer has any power or control. As the apostle Paul tells us in Romans, "***For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.***" (Romans 6:6 NIV) Jesus didn't make the ultimate sacrifice for our sins so that we could just go on living under sin's power and control. No! He died to take those sins off our record and destroy the power that sin has over our hearts and minds. He suffered all this so that we might **Follow in His Steps** and **2. live for righteousness.** Yes, He died to forgive us and save us eternally—that was

absolutely His main goal in dying for us—but He also died to change us spiritually; from lost creatures who are dead in sins, to God’s children who **live for righteousness**.

It should absolutely appall us when we see ourselves falling into the very sins from which Christ freed us by His shed blood on the cross. It should lead us to Godly sorrow and repentance. Christ’s payment was much too great, our souls are much too valuable, and the stakes are much too high for us to continue to go back and wallow in the filth of sin. Notice what Peter writes in the last verse of our text, “*For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*” (v. 25) We are now, by faith, the sheep of Christ, our Good Shepherd. We are no longer wandering sheep, but sheep who **Follow in Christ’s Steps**, sheep who **live for righteousness**.

- When our own flesh tries to tempt us to wander from His paths we can confidently cling to Christ’s cross and His Word and know that we have died to sins! Sin no longer has power to control us.
- When Satan reminds us and accuses us of how many times we have failed to **Follow in Christ’s Steps** or **live for righteousness** we can rebuke him and look to Jesus, “*who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.*” (v. 24)
- When the world around us calls to us and tries to make us one of its own, we can point to the promises God made to us at our baptism and confidently claim, “I am Jesus’ little lamb!”

This is the power that Jesus has given us through His death and resurrection: “*that we might live for righteousness.*” (v. 24)

Following in Christ’s Steps may not always be easy; it may not always seem like the best way to go either: Too much work, too much suffering, too much sacrifice. But if it’s the road that our perfect Savior Jesus chose, is that not good enough? Shouldn’t we be able to trust the footsteps of our Good Shepherd to lead us where He knows is best? Yes!

And do you know what else? God has promised us His richest blessings when we **1. commit ourselves to the Lord** and **2. live for righteousness**. David reminds us in Psalm 37, “***Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.***” (Psalm 37:5) Jesus Himself promises, “***But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.***” (Matthew 6:33)

Maybe your life has seemed like a long, hard trudging through snow. Maybe especially over the past year it has seemed like an exhausting struggle to get through each day and put one foot in front of the other. Always remember: Jesus, your powerful, risen Savior is right there with you! He’s there with you to give you His strength and to lead you with the guidance and power of His Word; day by day, and step by step! Amen.

—**Pastor Luke Bernthal**

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