

“DISCOVERING YOUR MISSION!”

“And after saying this [Jesus] said to [Peter], “Follow me.”

Dear Friends in Christ:

Now that I’ve got a few more years on me, a senior citizen no less, a “retired” baby boomer collecting a pension, depending all on you younger folk working hard and long to cover my Social Security, I can relate in a more personal way to the verse in today’s Gospel when Jesus says to Peter, *“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.”* (John 21:18)

I never thought of it before, but that verse ranks right up there with all those sayings about the elderly and aged, like **“You Know You’re Old When...**

*You sit in a rocking chair and can't get it going...
Your knees buckle, and your belt won't...
Your back goes out more than you do...
Your ears are hairier than your head...*

And now, added to the list...

*“When you get old, you will stretch out your hands
and another will dress you and carry you
where you do not want to go!”*

It rings with the truth I often share with my wife when she laments my ever-growing senior moments, “*Honey, I hate to tell you, but it ain’t going to get any better!*”

But Jesus, of course, wasn’t making a case in the Gospel for the disciples to join AARP – no, he was identifying for Peter some of the realities of what it means to “*follow Him.*” The Risen Lord was alerting the Apostle to the cost of discipleship, especially when the mission is defined as “*feed my sheep*” and “*tend my lambs.*” Peter wants Jesus to back off the question, “*Simon...do you love me more than these?*” But the Savior presses on, asking the same thing three times, preparing Peter for a life of discipleship that would lead to martyrdom in Rome for his witness to Jesus. There will come that time, Jesus alludes, “*when you will want to go that way,*” Peter, but your mission requires “*this way*” – the way of sacrifice and service, commitment, courage and cost.

To be sure, Peter’s mission was extra-ordinary; similar to the mission God gave Joshua in the Old Testament lesson, taking up the mantle of Moses to lead the children of Israel across the Jordan. God promises to be with Joshua, “*to never leave nor forsake him,*” but Joshua would also need to “*be strong and very courageous,*” never turning from God’s commands. (Joshua 1:5-7) There is never a time, you see, when the mission to follow the will and way of God comes easy - at least not

in the Bible I read! Not for Peter. Not for Joshua. Not for John the Baptizer who prepares us in this season of Advent for the coming of the Christ! And certainly not for Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, the Son of God who gives His life on Calvary's Cross!

So, as we conclude this 10 week Discipleship Sermon series, focusing on **“discovering your mission,”** it's really important in my mind that we are clear about three things: **1. *We have a mission.*** **2. *It requires courage.*** **3. *We ain't alone!***

Your mission, and mine, simply and succinctly is to *“follow through”* on the call of Jesus to *“follow me.”* [*Hear that again!*] When we respond to Christ's invitation to discipleship, claimed to be His own in Holy Baptism, called to faith by His saving grace, there should be some evidence in our thoughts, words and deeds, in our family and lifestyle, in our vocation and relationships that we are Christians. We're are to be, if you will, *“smartphones for Jesus,”* everything we say and do synced to His Word, the *“cloud”* hanging over us a database of *“loving the Lord with all our hearts and loving our neighbors as much as we do ourselves!”*

That's our mission every day, tweaked individually by the varieties' of gifts and services and activities which the Holy Spirit empowers in each one of us. And the Scripture is clear: *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* (1 Corinthians 12:7) I might

be called to be a pastor, you a helper; one a teacher, another good at administration; one an encourager, another who gives generously; one who leads and another who shows mercy – all different, each important because followers of Jesus are always saved by grace through faith for service - for discipleship – for living out our daily mission of Christ making a difference – letting the light shine!

Your mission, and mine, (#1) simply and succinctly is to “*follow through*” on the call of Jesus to “*follow me.*” And let me tell you (#2) **it requires courage!** Just like Joshua we have the same promise that “*God will be with us and never forsake us,*” but there are always pulls and tugs when it comes to following Jesus, sin and Satan tempting us to stray from the path set before us. Like Peter, there is a world around us that does not embrace or understand allegiance to Christ, and none of us is fully prepared for the sacrifice and service, commitment, courage and cost that come with discovering our mission - we just aren't! We're challenged in so many ways by a culture and time that presents more preferable alternatives: “*Do your thing. Believe what you want. Follow your heart! Whatever feels right!*” It takes courage to stand up for Jesus and espouse Christian values in a loving and respectful way, especially when you feel intimidated and pressured by peers, family, friends and colleagues. I get that, it's hard for me too...and that's why “*courage*” is such an important part of discovering your mission!

The good news (#3) **“we ain’t alone!”** We got each other – this community called the church! We’re all in the same boat, standing on the same seashore, hearing the challenge of Jesus, *“Simon, Preston.....do you love me more than these?”* *“Yes, Lord, You know that I love you!”* *“I wish you would quit asking!”* But in the question is not Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, our coming King and Savior, reaching out just as God always does, drawing us closer, back again, renewing and restoring us to the mission at hand? One word, one action, one deed, one prayer, one kindness, one faithful response, one thing that is so uniquely you and me that impacts the life of someone else for Christ – one at a time - is what keeps us together...and keeps Hope strong! When you live out your mission, and me mine, there is encouragement, strength, power and resolve, this church stronger as the Body of Christ because we are not alone!

How I pray today that in this season of Advent, as we prepare for the Savior’s birth, we will re-discover and embrace the mission of *“following through”* on the call of Jesus to *“follow me.”* How can we not, for this is the Messiah of whom the angel sang: *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord?”* Your mission, and mine, is to *“follow through”* on the call of Jesus to *“follow me.”*

God bless us in the journey! AMEN.