

CALLED TO FOLLOW CHRIST CLOSELY UNDER THE CROSS

Christ is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this “Good Shepherd” Sunday, a day which enters every year into the season of the Resurrection of our Lord,

For to this all of you were called, because Christ also suffered concerning all of you, to all of you leaving behind (an underwritten) copy, in order that you all might have followed closely His footprints.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This day, every year, has a context. That is the Resurrection of our Lord. Biblically defined, that is the time period from Good Friday through Resurrection Morn. This Easter season is given to us to remember that Christ’s bodily resurrection from the dead was guaranteed and made certain by His bodily death on the Cross. No death on the tree, no tree of life.

For more than five centuries, evangelical congregations have rejoiced in the God Who loved His wandering people enough to come into their midst. We Whom He has declared righteous in His resurrection shout for joy that He came to die for His people. Before and after He died in our sins, in your sins, in the sins of the whole world, He spoke with His Voice – His proclaimed Word – to call them/us back to Him.

That means that this is an annual week given to us in order that we might remember God’s mercy through the Cross of Jesus, the Beautiful Shepherd. We celebrate the fact that He entered into the midst of His scattered flock – the people of God, whose individual members are often known only to Him. He did so to unite them, us, together to follow Him in this life and into eternal rest. All that and more is contained our theme verse chosen for this week, this year:

For to this all of you were called, because Christ also suffered concerning all of you, to all of you leaving behind (an underwritten) copy, in order that you all might have followed closely His footprints.²

¹ 1 Peter 2:21.

² 1 Peter 2:21.

Because this day of the Church Year has been around so long, it has a given name. The traditional title for this Sunday of the Church Year is, “Misericordias Domini.” Those Latin words are drawn from the ancient Introit Psalm for this day of the Church Year. We would hear the name translated like this, “The mercies of the Lord...” Today, we heard the day’s name rendered, “the steadfast love of the Lord.”

Therefore, this is another day/week in the Church year to hear about God’s mercies shown in His steadfast, enduring, unconditional love. You, dear Christians, realize God’s love is displayed most clearly when you grasp the divine revelation that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That is why you have learned to look to the Cross bearing Christ for your salvation. There you behold not an empty relic, but God’s victory emblem bearing the image of the Living God carried into death. Today that eternal Truth is revealed to the faithful with words like these: *Christ also suffered for all of you...*

The context for those words as you heard them proclaimed today is found in all the readings of this Sunday. That leads you to think of them as they related to the Good Shepherd, literally, the “Beautiful Shepherd,” (this is the word Deacon Tom so artfully dealt with in the approved words he delivered to us during Passiontide, in Holy Week). As you behold the Cross of Christ, with the image of His lifeless body adorning it, do you think to remember that this is what God determines to be beautiful for you?

Here the Author of Life hangs. You are called to behold Him as He truly was once for you – naked, bloodied, beaten – His Body torn by the cat-o-nine-tails laced with bits of glass and bone, the crown of thorns jammed into His brow. Behold the beauty of the Shepherd who submitted to the will of God to save you.... Then, hear the apostle’s call:

to all of you, (that Christ’s suffering is to be beheld as) leaving behind (an underwritten) copy, in order that you all might have followed closely His footprints.³

In the context of the apostolic letter which serves for this day’s sermon, just before the opening words you heard today, *for to this all of you were called*, there is a call to the

³ 1 Peter 2:21b,c.

faithful to patiently endure suffering for doing good. That is why Peter reminds those who are suffering on account of good-works to look to God's underwritten copy for encouragement. That means that the suffering of Christ is to be viewed by the Christian suffering for good to have signed for in His blood. The underwritten copy, the Body of God nailed to a tree, declares that He has accepted all liability in His act of Faith.

Such an underwritten copy is far more than an encouragement to some "Jesus as example" manner of life. Today's apostolic pronouncement is certainly not holding believers to the '80s and '90s pop-Christian marketing theology: "What would Jesus do?" (Law). Nor does it call one to heed the '90s CPH-marketed response to that works – righteous theology, "Fully rely on God," (More Law). Jesus alone did that Law perfectly – and you have the images of what that cost Him that before you.

Such scenes have been burned, for generations, into the brains of believers. Think about this: in our era of the Church one cannot un-see the brutality of the *Passion of the Christ*. Nor can one who annually recalls the Christ of Passiontide long un-imagine the events portrayed around these walls.

You have heard twice already today that the context in which the Word of God which is proclaimed is important. First, it was mentioned as the place of the reading amidst the other readings of the day. (That is from whence its primary proclamation is meant to come during the Lord's Services). Second, it was mentioned as its actually setting in the reading itself. That which comes before and that which follows. Now, a third context comes forth. That is found in the biblical sources the writer of the day's emphasis text used.

Today, those are revealed to be from Old Covenant texts in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. There is also appears to be an allusion to Job. As I Peter may have been written at the same time as the Letter to the Hebrews, that work also holds a similar message in Christ's suffering once for many. Then, as this day's letter appears to have been written following the Gospel of Mark, (though likely delivered through the same human author), there is reference to Jesus' own testimony recorded in that book.

That is not all declared to turn this into a Bible study. Rather, it is proclaimed in love to call you who would be found faithful to the Word of God to spend time each week in reviewing the upcoming Sunday texts in such contexts. We are living in an era, in a society, when Old Covenant biblical literacy is nowhere near what it was during the time of St. Peter.

We may be closer, in the Church, to the biblical literacy in the times of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. They prophesied before the Lord caused the fall of first Israel, the northern Davidic kingdom, and Judah, the southern Davidic kingdom. Then God brought destruction on those who had been called to be His people because of their lack of faithfulness to His entire Word. Biblical literacy appeared low. God's once-chosen people had followed their leaders to other gods.

So, today, you are being called to spend more time in preparing to hear God's Word proclaimed each week. If you cannot think of the contexts of the texts in today's Epistle, repent! Turn to the tools this congregation gives you each week. One of those is in your bulletin. Have you ever noticed that some of your brothers and sisters in Christ are sitting here reading through the texts of the day before the services? If not, that is one reason why your pastors and elders from time-to-time remind you to maintain a quiet Nave before the preludes. (That is in addition to the reality that our church musicians care enough about you and the Word of God to carefully select pre-service music which will support the day's proclamation).

Some of the biblical contexts helps regularly appear on the upper left hand corner of the back page of our bulletins. Our Office Manager cares enough about you to ensure they are there and correct—for your benefit. You are free to read them alone in the privacy of your own studies. Or, you may share them at your household tables.

Others tools for knowing the biblical contexts of the Sunday texts are normally available here after Sunday and Wednesday morning services. One, outside of Lent and Advent, is offered before Wednesday evening services. Still others may be found semi-regularly on Mondays and Saturdays, off site on Thursdays (morning and evening).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ-crucified, we desire that you to be found faithful when the Lord brings destruction on this world for its unfaithfulness and unrepentedness. You are being called to be part of God's faithful remnant in this generation. God today is calling you to follow the footprints of Christ, through His passion, into death. The prophets of ancient Israel, to the repentant sinners of their day declare that which Peter declares to you who are repentant today the One Whose footprints you are freed to follow:

*Who, sin did not do,
and neither was deceit found in His mouth.
Who, continually being vilely abused, He did not return abuse,
continually suffering, He did not threaten,
but handed Himself over to the One continually judging justly;
Who, for our sins, bore them up in His Body upon the tree...⁴*

Up to 700 years before those Words were enacted by Jesus the Christ in His passion, the faithful continued suffering for doing good. For almost 2,000 years after those prophecies were completed in the dead guy on a stick God's faithful have been suffering for doing good works in Him. God's Word tells us why:

*That to the sins we having died, we might have lived for righteousness;
by Whose whelps that bleed all of you were healed.⁵*

Those words declare the death that was given to the faithful centuries before it occurred in time. That is because God who judges rightly determined in Himself to pay the price for His people's sinfulness. Even when St. Peter was moved to record his letter, the Holy Spirit viewed the death to sin, and life to righteousness – living declared right before God the Eternal Judge – as an accomplished act in time with enduring action.

God Father, Son and Holy Spirit judged that it was necessary that God alone could and would bear the bleeding wounds your sins deserved. He, in the ultimate action of sacrificial love, "Misericordias Domini," bore His own wrath at sin, and the punishment it deserved into death. The merciful heart of God is shown in the blood of the Son,

⁴ 1 Peter 2:22-24a.

⁵ 1 Peter 2:24b

poured out for you. Soon, it will be poured into you. Such was, and is, all God's work, as our text declares of all the faithful:

*For all of you were as continually wandering sheep,
but you have been returned now by the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.⁶*

There is so much hope declared in those ending words. The Beautiful Shepherd, bloodied, beaten, dead in your sins, sought you out. He called you with His Voice – His proclaimed Word. He returned you who were once lost – and we all were lost for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There are no exceptions in that text – not the Blessed Virgin, nor Joseph, nor infants still in the womb. All were lost, until the Word came and rescued them you. The fact that you are here today hearing this Word means that God has done all that is necessary to bring you into this, His fold in this place. To that reality, we declare: Christ is risen!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Resurrection III (*LSB* One-year series)

Psalm 23; Introit Psalm 32:1 (5b-6a); Ezekiel 34:11-16; I Peter 2:21-25; John 10:11-16

April 10, 2106

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

⁶ I Peter 2:25.

*For into this all of you were called, because Christ also suffered concerning all of you,
leaving behind (a) copy for you,
in order that all of you might have been followers upon His footprints.*

*Who, sin did not do,
And neither was deceit found in His mouth.*

*Who, continually being vilely abused, He did not return abuse,
continually suffering, He did not threaten,
but handed Himself over to the One continually judging justly;*

*Who, for our sins, bore them up in His Body upon the tree,
that we, having departed from sins, we might have lived for righteousness;
by Whose bruise that bleeds you all were healed.*

*For all of you were as continually wandering sheep,
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