

Lent 2 – B 02/25/2024

Most of us have played the game, “Follow the Leader”. It involves making choices whether to follow a person or not over and through things. There are some whom you can trust to keep you safe, there are others whom you need to be careful with. We have many people today who say, come, follow me.

What kind of criteria do we set up for whom we decide to follow? Number one, it is a good idea to look at their history and what kind of choices they have made in the past. Number two, how have they treated people especially those who have little. Number three what have they gained, knowledge or money, power and control.

There are no perfect human leaders. This week we will be the site for 3 precincts for the presidential primary elections, even though we probably know who the candidates are. As I said last Sunday, I would not tell you who to vote for, but these are criteria that I would use in making a decision. Above all ask God.

Healthy leadership in our work places are more and more difficult to find. There is so much anxiety on whether you have a job and how you look to the boss. Who is trying to please who? Doing a good honest job is not always the ticket today. We have experienced in many different forms a lack of work ethic.

That leads me to the question, “Who are people following?” As Christians, I believe that we are called to have a healthy work ethic. I worked at a Friendly’s while going to seminary. After having worked the middle shift as a manager, the dishwasher for the night was a high school guy. He came in to pick up his check and quit on the spot. I felt that was irresponsible on the part of he and his parents. Yes there could have been extenuating circumstances, but at least 2 weeks’ notice. I worked half of the shift then as the dishwasher.

Of course, as Christians, we are called to follow Jesus. Which we can never fully do. In our Gospel lesson for today Jesus is trying to let his disciples know what will be coming, that he must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Peter was not looking for this in a leader, one to follow, thus he took Jesus aside and said no this won’t be happening.

Jesus said, Peter your anxiety has gotten the best of you, you are setting your mind on earthly things and not trusting me, your leader. Thus, if you really want to follow me, you must let go of your anxiety and wanting to have it your way and take up your cross and follow me.

Now too often this gets interpreted to be, look at me, I have to do this all by myself. This is not what Jesus is saying. He is saying that we can't rely on ourselves for direction. We are called to rely on Jesus which means studying God's word and listening to others to discern how to carry the cross together.

Jesus models what it means to carry the cross until he physically has to do it. Jesus is trying to clue them in that following him and carrying his cross together may not be what we are looking for. It will mean realizing that we don't have the all the answers and focusing only on us is not following him.

Jesus is not asking us to throw our lives away when he says we need to deny ourselves and lose our lives. It is giving our wills over to Jesus. It is realizing that we own nothing in God's eyes as in reality, God owns everything. It is about forever trying to discern God's will for our life and living that out.

This is not what saves us, but it is a response to God's love in Jesus Christ. We are called to live our lives for the sake of others. This is what Jesus modeled for us, as recorded in our Gospels. Even to the end Jesus lived out God's will.

It is not easy, and it creates anxiety as it did for Peter. There are times we would like to say, no Jesus it's not supposed to be this way. Anxiety comes when we are trying to protect ourselves. Not all anxiety is bad. It can be a red flag, but it can also be something that clouds our view of God's will for our lives and life of our community of faith.

Change brings anxiety. We are in the process of transition, and we just lost one of our faithful witnesses. Walter was becoming the president of Faith Lutheran Church. When I think of the criteria that I suggested in looking to follow a leader, Number one, it is a good idea to look at their history and what kind of choices they have made in the past. Number two, how have they treated people especially those who have little. Number three what have they gained, knowledge or money, power and control. I believe I can see Walter fulfilling these to the best of his human ability.

He was also a valued voice on the transition team. From what I have heard and seen, Walter was a sure and steady leader. He listened to people, he helped guide Faith through some conflicted times. Walter was not out for glory as I believe what he prayed for is that this beloved community would become healthier and more focused on doing God's will at this time.

Walter saw changes that could be made to make Faith a healthier beloved community. When a trusted and valued leader moves on, it is important for us to stop and consider what he taught us by the way he led. It looks like our newly elected vice president, Randy Royalty will be taking over as president. Walter

asked Randy to serve as vice president, not knowing that his life on earth was drawing to a close. I do believe Walter relied on God for direction here also.

What Jesus is calling us to do is to bear the cross together. We need leaders and we need followers. At certain times in our lives, we are called to be one or the other. Whether we are a leader or a follower it is all bearing the cross together.

God has been teaching through leaders, including Jesus, that we are called to put our wills aside for the care of God's people.

Thomas Shepherd, *pub.*1693

1. Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone,
And there's a cross for us.

v. 2 by **Anonymous/Unknown**

2. How happy are the saints above,
Who once went sorr'wing here!
But now they taste unmingled love,
And joy without a tear.

v. 3 by **George N. Allen**, *pub.*1844

3. The consecrated cross we'll bear
Till death shall set us free;
And then go home our crown to wear,
For there's a crown for us.

Jesus calls us today to follow him first, to bear his cross together. As we are deciding who we follow, consider these criteria: Number one, it is a good idea to look at their history and what kind of choices they have made in the past. Number two, how have they treated people especially those who have little. Number three what have they gained, knowledge or money, power and control.

Jesus modeled this for us and now calls us to follow him and that bearing the cross together we may model what it means to follow Jesus to carry and model his life giving love to this power driven world.