

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them,²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (NIV84)

Theme: Follow the Lord.

1. Repent from your sins.
2. Leave your life behind.

What does it mean to follow someone? If you follow your favorite athlete or team, or actor or musician—or whatever, then you probably know a good amount of information about them. You’ll read about them on the internet. Perhaps you’ll follow them on twitter. If they are on tv you’ll watch them play or perform. You’ll go to their movies. You will read articles about them in magazines. Perhaps you’ll even take the time to see them in person—whether at a game or in a concert. The thing is, you’ll make the effort to follow them. The same can be said about following Christ. To follow Christ means to walk in his footsteps. To follow him means to know more about

him and what he has done for us. Today, Christ calls us believers to follow him.

Part of following Christ is obeying Christ. As John says in verse four of our 2nd lesson for today, **The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.** Those who follow Jesus strive to follow his Word. We obey his commands. We strive to do what he says. No matter what it is, we will try to obey him.

We won’t always do it. No, there are many times—numerous times a day that we’ll fail to follow the Lord. Instead we’ll follow the ways of the world. We’ll follow what our sinful nature desires. We’ll seek to please ourselves. And so we deserve his wrath and punishment. We ought to go to hell to suffer forever for each and everyone of our sins.

We often talk a big game. We often say that we will obey God. But we often fail. Try as we might, we go against his Word all the time.

“Come Follow Me” the WELS-produced video that we watched in Bible Class today, focuses on Peter. Jesus called Peter to be his disciple. And he was one of Jesus’ closest disciples. Part of the inner circle—that special group of disciples who were especially close to Jesus.

But think of what happened on the night Jesus was betrayed. On Maundy Thursday, in the upper room, Peter said to Jesus, **Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.** But that’s exactly what happened. Jesus was arrested. Peter found himself in the courtyard, outside of the place Jesus where was being interrogated. And three times he denied that he even knew the Savior. He was supposed to spread the message of Christ. Instead he pretended as if he never met Jesus. He rejected the Lord.

The guilt weighed heavy upon Peter. He went outside and wept bitterly. The whole incident ate at him. He had sinned against the Lord. Even after the resurrection he wonder how Jesus could ever forgive him.

There is a reason why Jesus went throughout Galilee preaching the gospel and urging the people, **repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.** To repent means to change your mind. What you did, you no

longer want to do. What seemed like a good idea at the time, you know realize is wrong. And it becomes detestable in your eyes. And you are filled with guilt and remorse over what you did. To repent is more than simply saying sorry. It's a deep-felt guilt and sorrow. Like Peter, you are filled with remorse because of what you have done. And yet you believe that Christ has paid for your sins. No matter what sins you have committed, you know that they are forgiven. For this there is no sin too great that God cannot forgive. There is not a single sin that Christ didn't take upon himself. There is not a single sin that he hasn't paid for. They have all been removed. They have all been placed on his shoulders. Not a single one will come back to us to haunt us. We have been set free from him. The second part of repentance is faith. Faith that you are forgiven in Christ. That is following Christ. It is believing in him for forgiveness.

After Jesus preached the gospel and urged people to repent, he started walking around the Sea of Galilee. He was looking for some men who had followed him some before. And he found Andrew and his brother Peter. **Come follow me**, he said. Jesus didn't need to say much more. They had been with him in Cana when he changed water into wine. They had seen him perform other miracles. They knew who he was and what he had done. **Come follow me**. So they followed him. As they walked along, Jesus saw another pair of brothers whom he knew. They were James and John. Sons of Zebedee. Again, Jesus didn't say much. He called to them. And they followed him. All four of these men were fisherman. So Jesus told Peter and Andrew that they he would make them **fishers of men**. At another occasion he told Peter, **from now on you will catch men**. What did Jesus mean? They would spread the gospel. And through the gospel the Holy Spirit would work faith into people's hearts. So through the gospel that they would spread people would be brought to faith in Jesus Christ. They would catch men for Jesus—so to speak. No longer would they worry about catching fish to eat and to sell. They would be concerned with spreading the gospel to make believers.

When Jesus called those four fishermen, what did they do? The immediately got up and followed Jesus. There was no hesitation. There was no second guessing. They got up and left. They left their jobs and their livelihoods. We know, at least later, that Peter had a

wife—perhaps he had a family. James and John left their Father behind. They put their lives aside and followed the Lord. They didn't care about their jobs, their family, or anything else. Nothing was as more important to them as following Christ.

What do we do? “Lord I want to follow you, but... But, I have some friends coming to visit and they are going to want to have a good time. But I've got this girl and she expects certain things from me. But my boss wants me to put in some extra hours—and every little bit helps, nowadays. But my family doesn't understand my faith—so it's important to spend some time with them and appease them. But it's prime hunting season, or the weather is too cold in the winter, or too nice to be inside during the summer. But I'm too busy to read your Word at home. But I've just got too much going on to study your Word in Bible Class. But I'm too afraid to share my faith. I just don't know what to say. What if people make fun of me, or say no to me—I don't think I could handle that.

We can offer all the excuses we want. But Jesus doesn't offer any room for excuses. In Luke 9 Jesus invited some people to follow him. But they made excuses. One's Father had died so he couldn't leave. Another one wanted to say good-bye to his family. The point is that they hesitated. The things of this world were more important to them than God. So Jesus replied that those who hesitate or long for the ways of the world **are not fit for service in the kingdom of God**. The point is this—there are no good excuses. There is no reason to hesitate. You follow your favorite athlete or actor, or musician or whatever. You make the time and the effort to know more about them, to watch them, and so on. But what have the done for you? Sure they may make you happy; you may enjoy their work. But what really, have they done for you? And yet you still make the time to follow them. But Jesus is your Lord and Savior. He is the one who gave up everything for you. He gave up the glories and riches of heaven to come down to this earth for you. He shed his blood on the cross. He suffered through the pain and agony of hell for you. He gave up everything—for you. And so you want to follow him. And you are willing to give up everything for him. You get up and follow him and don't worry or even think about the consequences.

So we follow the Lord. That means to listen to him. Jesus called these four men to be his disciples. A disciple is a pupil or student. They

follow their teacher around and learn from him. As disciples of Christ we learn from him in his Word. It is in his Word that God teaches us everything we need to know. We learn who he is, what he has done, and how he wants us to live our lives. As disciples of Jesus we want to know it all. We can't get enough. We are never satisfied with the knowledge that we have, but we want to know more. So we read his Word at home. We attend Bible Class. We are thirsty for me, and we can never get enough.

And what we learn, we share. We can't help but tell others about him. Like Andrew and Peter; and James and John, we are fishers of men. God uses us to spread his gospel so that others may believe. He will work through that gospel to be other people to faith. So that they too may become and disciple of Christ and join us in heaven forever. There is no hesitation. No second guessing. Christ alone has the words of eternal life. So you share those words with others so they too may believe.

Isn't that what we do as a synod? We are able to do things together as a synod that we can't do as individuals or as a congregation. Together as a synod we are able to send missionaries throughout the world to spread the gospel. They go to distant lands, often putting their lives on the line in order to catch men. We are able to produce sound biblical material and dozens of different languages. So we are able to spread the gospel in hard to reach areas—some of which we aren't even allowed to enter. We are able to train future pastors and teachers. Those whose jobs it will be specifically to catch men. That is why we join together—we walk together with our fellow believers, so that together as disciples of Christ we may follow him. So that together we might catch men.

Together we follow the Lord. Together we are his disciples. Together we spread the Word. We may fail at times to obey him. Actually we fail all the time. So we go to him with humble hearts and repent. And we know that even though we have sinned, we are freely forgiven in Christ. That is why we work together in the Lord. So that others who are living in the darkness of sin may see the light of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.