

## **KEEP CALM AND FOLLOW HIM**



***Scripture:***

**Galatians 5:1, 13-25**

<sup>1</sup>For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

<sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. <sup>14</sup>For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup>If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

<sup>16</sup>Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. <sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup>envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup>By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

**Luke 9:51-62**

<sup>51</sup>When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; <sup>53</sup>but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup>When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” <sup>55</sup>But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup>Then they went on to another village.

<sup>57</sup>As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” <sup>58</sup>And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” <sup>59</sup>To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

<sup>60</sup>But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” <sup>61</sup>Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”

<sup>62</sup>Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



## KEEP CALM AND FOLLOW HIM

A Scottish atheist was spending a Sunday fishing when suddenly his boat was attacked by the Loch Ness monster. In one easy flip, the beast tossed him and his boat high into the air. Then it opened its mouth to swallow both. As the man sailed head over heels, he cried out, "Oh, my God! Help me!"

At once, the ferocious attack froze in place, and as the atheist hung in mid-air, a booming voice came down from the clouds, "I thought you didn't believe in Me!"

"Come on God, give me a break!!" the man pleaded. "Two minutes ago I didn't believe in the Loch Ness monster either!"

This makes us laugh, but this story contains a lot of truth in human nature, doesn't it? Don't we too often decide to pray to God only when it may benefit us immediately at the time?

We may trust that following Jesus will lead us on the way to a better life, but many of us get distracted and don't truly focus on our faith. We might go through the motions out of habit just enough to socialize and to be considered good people.

## NOT A LUKEWARM DECISION

Well Jesus makes it clear to his disciples in this passage that following him is not a lukewarm decision. It is a commitment of time, and resources, and a sacrifice to truly authentically follow our Lord and Savior.

These words from this passage today were written almost nineteen decades ago and yet they still ring true. Luke 9 clearly explains the cost for the true followers of Jesus. These words are not for the wishy-washy. These are some of the hard teachings of Jesus.

Mark Twain commented about some of these verses when he said, "*It's not the things I don't understand in the Bible that worry me, it's the things I understand perfectly clear that worry me.*"

Without sugar coating his words, Jesus is calling for obedience to God and setting his face towards Jerusalem knowing that there his

ultimate sacrifice must be made. By this point in his ministry he realizes there are pretend followers and there are true followers. And he knows his three years of teachings conflict with the status quo, so as a result he feels he has no earthly place to call home, and no place to rest until his mission is finished.

## DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

During WWII, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When Jesus bids someone to come and follow, he bids them to come and die."

He meant two ways of dying here. First, you must die to the old life you had and be transformed with a new abundant life in Christ. But he also meant you should risk your physical life for Christ as well.

Could you die for Christ? Many Christians followed the ways of Christ during the Holocaust in Germany. A good friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's was Pastor Martin Niemoller.

In the beginning of Hitler's rise to power, Niemoller supported getting rid of the communists. But when Hitler tried to Nazify the German Protestant churches, Niemoller, Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and others started the Confessing Church movement which was an independent underground anti-Nazi church.

A famous poem written by Niemoller during WWII applies to our lives today as well.

### WHEN THEY CAME

*When the Nazis came for the communists,  
I remained silent;  
I was not a communist.  
When they locked up the socialists,  
I remained silent;  
I was not a socialist.  
When they came for the trade union workers,  
I did not speak out;  
I was not a trade unionist.  
When they came for the Jews,  
I remained silent;  
I wasn't a Jew.  
When they came for me,  
there was no one left to speak out for me.*

Today Pastor Martin would add:

*When they came for the LGBT people,  
I remained silent.*

*When they came for the Muslims,  
I did not speak out,  
I wasn't Muslim.*

### **DO JUSTICE**

To follow Jesus we must do justice, protect the oppressed, speak out and advocate for the vulnerable and be the voice for those whose voices are not heard. We are to empower those with no power so that all have an equal chance in this world.

Desperate people do desperate things. So our job as Christians is to help people not become desperate. Be a mentor to someone not in your immediate family, be an advocate for mental health services, be a guide to someone who needs support and hope for a future.

**C.S. Lewis explains that the key to focusing your life on Jesus is to look up, not down on people. He said, "A proud person is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."**

### **BE HIS WITNESS**

Jesus Christ calls you and me to follow him now, not tomorrow, not next week, we are called to be his witness to this world today and from now on. Not in a lukewarm way but in a passionate, enthusiastic way. Shape the purpose of your life around his love and grace, and transform your life into one that clearly speaks his love and truth through your actions daily.

That means, welcoming all types of people into this church family and into your social circles as well. Make an effort to reach out to those who would be considered aliens and the least of these: orphans, widows, refugees. Go out of your comfort zone and make friends with those who are very different from you.

Following Jesus is not for cowards. It takes courage and commitment to follow his path

because it is difficult and often surprising and uncomfortable. But the reward of abundant life in Christ is more fulfilling and blessed than you could ever imagine.

### **INVITE JESUS TO LIVE IN YOU**

C.S. Lewis explained what it's like to invite Jesus to live in you.

*"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But then--- He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house --- throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."*

### **BEING JESUS' HANDS AND FEET IN THIS WORLD**

Be the witness to Christian discipleship that builds up your palace in the kingdom of God for all the world to see -- which means to sacrifice now, to put others first before yourself now, to risk your life to serve him now. True discipleship is focused on getting to know Jesus better everyday through prayer and scripture reading so you know who you are following and how you are to behave as his hands and feet in this world.

### **APARTHEID**

Like during the Holocaust, Apartheid in South Africa inspired brave Christians to speak out against their government. Many people who sincerely followed the way of Jesus risked their lives by protesting the unjust system of Apartheid. Nelson Mandela suffered greatly in prison for twenty-seven years. But when he was freed he forgave the government and advocated for others to reconcile with their oppressors. Nobel Peace Prize winner, Bishop Desmond

Tutu, was an important leader in the forgiveness and reconciliation movement, too.

### **BELHAR CONFESSION**

Out of that era in South Africa in the eighties, the Belhar Confession was born in 1982. The Belhar Confession was first adopted by the United Reformed Church in South Africa. It comes from a Christian view of racism, separation, and suffering by those who experienced the realities of Apartheid.

The Dutch Reformed church leaders who authored the Belhar Confession suffered as a result of writing it. Russel Botman was jailed and tortured. Supporters of Apartheid attacked the Belhar Confession and called it a communist document. Yet, the confession had a huge impact on the fall of Apartheid in 1990.

In 2010, the Reformed Church of America added the Belhar to their confessions. Our own Presbyterian Church USA General Assembly adopted this confession just last Wednesday in Oregon. It will be added to our Book of Confessions, which is the second part of our Church Constitution; our first part is the Book of Order.

(A video of the Belhar Confession was shown to the congregation.)

The authors of the Belhar Confession gifted us with a wonderful example of what it means to follow Jesus Christ and stand up for justice even at the risk of losing their lives. Thanks be to God for this wonderful gift to our Presbyterian Church USA.

### **Benediction:**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. As Christians who take seriously Christ's call to follow in his ways, let us commit ourselves to speaking truth to power.**

**You are called to make sure justice for all rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amen**



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