

✠ JOHN 21:1-19 ✠

**In Nomine Iesu**

We hear of our Lord's invitation to His disciples at the beginning of the Gospel accounts to follow Him. He called out to James and John to follow Him, and so they left their fishing business and their father, and they followed Him. He called out to Peter to follow Him, and so Peter did. Matthew left His tax collector's booth and followed Jesus. Andrew, Thomas, Philip, Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, all called by Jesus, all followed Jesus.

Jesus would tell others to follow Him. He told the rich young ruler to sell everything and follow Him, but he didn't. He told the man who needed to bury his dead to let the dead bury the dead and follow Him, but he didn't. He told the Pharisees and teachers of the Law to give up their self-made righteousness and follow Him, but they didn't.

But the disciples, the twelve, they followed Him into the synagogues and into the Temple. They followed Him up the mountains and into the plains. They followed Him when others left Him. They followed Him when the Jewish leaders assaulted Him with questions and traps. They followed our Lord wherever He went.

"Follow me," and they did. They witnessed His miracles and heard His parables. They were privy to the meanings of the parables when others were not. They witnessed His power over creation as He calmed the storm and walked on water. They saw Him feed multitudes with insufficient means and they saw Him call forth the dead from their tombs and cast out the demons from those possessed. They witnessed His Transfiguration and they saw His zeal for the house of His Father.

They were His inner circle, His closest friends and most devout disciples. To them was given the secrets of the kingdom of God, for they obeyed the command and invitation of the Christ: "Follow me."

But in all of this following, in their privileged status as the inner circle, the Gospels tell us that they were still ignorant of where Jesus was going. They were awed by the miracles, the wisdom, the incredible way in which Jesus handled His enemies, but they did not know where He was going.

They did not understand when Jesus revealed to them that He must suffer at the hands of men and die on the cross. They did not understand that He must be raised again so as to justify the human race in the eyes of God. They did not know where He was going. "I go to prepare a place for you," He told them, "so that I can come and get you." To which Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going" (John 14:2-5).

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9:59). Nowhere, that is, except in the tomb. "Follow me."

The disciples followed Him to the upper room, where He instituted the Supper that would forgive their sins and incorporate them into His mystical body. They followed Him into the

Garden of Gethsemane, but they fell asleep while He anguished over His fate. They followed Him but they did not know where He was going.

“Little children,” our Lord said to those who followed Him, “yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come’” (John 13:33). Peter answered and said, “Lord where are you going? And why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you” (John 13:36-37). But, no, Simon Peter, you will not, you will betray your Lord and flee to keep your life. You will no longer follow the Son of Man.

Finally those who followed Jesus witnessed His betrayal, His beating, and crucifixion. They fled. Judas was the first to stop following Jesus. He betrayed His Lord and was given over to his depraved mind. Peter and the rest followed Judas now, betraying our Lord by denying Him and fleeing from His presence. “Follow me,” Jesus had said to them, but now it was too much, it was too great a price to follow Him. They ran away.

They ran and hid. They locked themselves in rooms and quietly whispered lest the enemy hear where they were. You can imagine that the leaders of the Jews were quite content to let the misfit band of disciples stay hidden. They had killed their Teacher and Leader, they had turned one of His own against Him and had witnessed the rest flee in terror and confusion.

Perhaps there were some of the High Priest’s court that saw Peter outside the court of the High Priest, knew Peter, and watched with devilish glee as this poor Galilean fisherman betrayed his Master at the first sign of trouble and heartache. They let him go, what threat was he, a broken and weeping man, now that they had Jesus in their gnarled claws?

Now the disciples knew where Jesus was going, and so they did not follow Him.

Now there is nothing. No rebellion, no restoration of Israel, no places of glory. In the mundane lives of fishermen-turned-warriors-turned-fishermen, Peter has nothing better to say or to do that go fishing. The rest follow him. They had seen the Risen Lord, but where was He now? What do we do? Where do we go? Let’s go fishing.

But Jesus never leaves His chosen ones. He stands on the shore and calls out, “Children, have you any fish? Have you anything without me?” No. “Then let me fill your nets and give you the gift only I can give.”

The disciples were back on the uncertain waters, back in the mercy of the storms and waves, but Jesus stood on the shore and beckoned them come. Peter threw himself into the sea and the others followed. Eagerness filled the air: what was He going to do? What was He going to say? Would He rebuke their unbelief? Or would He give them consolation?

“Peter, do you love me?” What pain. Of course I love you. “Feed my sheep. Do you love me?” Oh, it hurts that He might doubt my love: of course I love you. “Tend my sheep. Do you love me?” Unbearable agony at the doubt of my Lord: Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. “Feed my sheep.”

“Restore life to those who are dying: feed them. Give hope to those who hunger: feed them. Sustain those who are weak: feed them. For I tell you when you are old another will dress you and will lead you where you do not want to go. Follow me.”

Now it clicks. Follow me. Now His teachings and life make sense. Follow me. Now His

miracles are seen in the proper light. Follow me. Now we know what it means to follow Him; now we know where He is going and He still beckons: "Follow me."

He went to the cross and we are to follow Him into death. For our Lord said this to Peter to show what kind of death he would die. Jesus died and is the first to rise, and now we follow Him. Now we march toward Golgotha, bearing our crosses, and following Jesus into the death of sin. He was the Lamb who was slain; we are the sheep who are slaughtered.

Jesus says to us, "I am the Son of God given into death; you, my people, are made sons of God by dying. I set my face toward Jerusalem to face death; you set your faces on me so as to come out of death. Follow me.

"It's not about living right and being nice. It's about dying. Die to sin and live to God. Follow me. Follow me into death so that I can lead you into life. Follow me. I am the way; follow me.

"You will be killed for my sake, but do not fret or be afraid. Your death is the death of sin and my life lived in my Father, in whom you also now live, is yours. Follow me."

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠