

Follow the leader!

1 Peter 3: 18-22

Mark 1: 9-15 sermon

Follow the Leader is an old familiar children's game. I am sure we can all recall memories of following each other in a line around a room or a playground, jumping over this, skipping around that, and watching intently to be sure we followed the leader precisely. We might have played this game just for fun, or someone might have used the game to teach us the role of a good follower. In these days of Lent, I invite us all to think about our role as followers.

In recent months we have moved from the anticipation of the birth of the Christ child to the knowledge of Jesus ministry. And in these weeks of Lent, through the Scriptures, we will watch and follow our Lord as he walks to Jerusalem on to Golgotha and then to the Cross

What does it mean for us to follow Jesus?

During Lent, we are called to face our true nature. Our own true, yearning, needy nature as it is laid bare for us to examine. It is not a time for self-loathing or wallowing in self-pity. It is a time of being honest, a time to look at our whole self. A time for us to examine ourselves and see where there is room for God's grace where we may need to yield to His Lordship.

This self-reflection is not easy, but it is necessary. It is necessary, so that we may be continuing to conform into the image of Christ. That we may move forward in the Faith. This reflection should be an ongoing process but is emphasized by the Church during these 40 days.

Where Jesus leads, we are called to follow. We are to follow not sit back and mindlessly flip through channels of a stagnant spiritual life. We are called into relationship with the one we call our Lord. And relationship requires participation by all. So, we follow Jesus, our Leader, into these days of Lent.

To examine ourselves, once again to look into life's mirror, to be honest with God, to seek the things that distract us from God's kingdom work. Or, to say it another way, we are to examine those things that keep us from being transformed into Christ's image.

Are we feeling so safe in ourselves, our houses, our relationships, that we no longer work to maintain spiritual health and wholeness? What are you

tempted to believe or deny, to do or to neglect, as you journey into self-reflection?

Jesus, the One we are called to follow, knows about temptation.

God's very Spirit, in Mark's telling has descended upon Jesus identified Him as the beloved Son. Then this same Spirit, drives Him into the wilderness. Jesus is driven into the wilderness by God's Spirit. And Mark makes it clear that Satan is there, that temptation is there.

Though it might strike us as strange that God's Spirit would drive Jesus into the wilderness and temptation, we should recognize that the life of faith often leads us as followers into the wilderness.

Is God's Spirit driving, or swiftly kicking you into the wilderness? Our wilderness is often the landscape of where we live where we reside. It can even encompass at times, the landscape of family.

Do you feel the dry desert air of the wilderness of our culture?

Do you need driven? Do you need a push from the Holy Spirit in order to get you up, to wake you up, to follow Jesus, to follow the Leader? Perhaps we all do. Perhaps we need to wake up grow up spiritually and follow the leader.

We have a great privilege in the days of Lent, and all the days of our life in faith, to be led by God's Spirit. We pay particular attention during Lent to how the wilderness of temptation can teach us, shape us, and help us, to be better followers. The wilderness can prepare us to follow the leader wherever he may lead. The wilderness can prepare us to boldly proclaim, "I will go Lord If you lead me." The words from this contemporary Christian Hymn state it so very well:

Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord.

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

So, we go during these 40 days of Lent into the wilderness, to see what God has in store for us. To learn what God's Spirit must teach us, so we will passionately follow our Lord.

Remember Jesus, our Leader, does not stay in the wilderness. The forty-day's end; and Jesus goes forth in fulfilling His ministry.

The temptation does not last beyond its time.

The wilderness, this time of self-examination, leads to ministry. It leads to action.

Jesus, our Leader, has walked through the wilderness.

And when he returned, we are told Jesus returned to Galilee and proclaimed to all:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

In other words, the Leader of the Universe turns to those who have ears and to us this day, the time is fulfilled The Kingdom of God is at hand Now repent.

We are called to do something. To repent!

To repent means to turn away from the direction in which we are heading, and after we turn, we are called to make another decision. Jesus says follow me.

We are to turn, and then to follow Jesus. Our Leader is not stagnant; he is not standing still.

After the wilderness, Jesus emerges to fulfil His ministry. Jesus full of the Holy Spirit turns and says, "Repent believe in the Good News".

He is calling us to repent to turn around, and then to follow. In our relationship with God in life's journey we have choices.

We can choose if and what we will believe. We can choose which path we will or will not take. We can choose if, who, how long, and how far we will follow.

Folks, things have not changed all that much since our youth. It was the same principle we had as children when we played "Follow the Leader." We could choose to play or not to play. We did not have to follow the leader. And even if we chose to play, we might latter choose to wander in our own direction. We were a part of the game only if we chose to participate. We could successfully complete the game, if we were willing to follow the leader wherever they would go.

It is that way for us this morning in our life of faith. We can choose whether or not we are going to follow. We can choose to follow then to leave and go our own way. Or we can choose to trust Him and follow wherever he may lead.

To repent requires the action of turning ourselves around.

To follow also requires an action. It requires us to pursue to follow in the footsteps of the one who is leading.

The fundamental question that we each must ask is this. Do I truly trust Jesus?
Is he your Saviour and your Lord?

Many will receive him as their Saviour, yet they do not trust him as Lord and therefore, they do not follow.

Do you trust him? Do you truly trust him?

That is a question that we each must answer with the dawn of each new day.

As you reflect on your inner life and as you begin to walk through these forty days of Lent, ask yourself, "do I trust Him?"

Each day, maybe multiple times during the day, we must decide who we will follow each day.

We must decide who we will serve.

It is my hope and prayer that with the dawn of each day you will boldly proclaim as Joshua (24:15) did, "as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD".

Amen.