C, Easter 3

Confirmation Sunday

Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, Brookings, SD

Rev. Matthew Wurm

May 5, 2019

**Sermon Text:** John 21:19

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The sermon text for this morning, is John 21:19, *“(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”*

Jesus has risen. He has appeared to Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and then to unbelieving Thomas who He makes to believe that He arose. Now He appears on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias and calls out to the seven disciples who had been out fishing all night. As the light was coming up that morning Jesus called out to them and asked them if they had any fish. They said “no” and Jesus told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. There were so many fish that they couldn’t haul it in. Peter recognized that it was the Lord Jesus Christ, so he put on his outer garment, jumped in the water and swam the 100 yards to shore. There Jesus served them all breakfast. When they were finished, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times and three times Peter said, “You know that I love You.” Three times Peter denied the Christ and now three times he confesses his love for the Lord Christ. Peter is reinstated and called to be an under-shepherd who feeds and tends the followers of the Chief-Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Jesus predicts how Peter will one day die and after saying all that, He says to Peter, “Follow me.” Then again in the verses following, Jesus says to Peter, “You follow me.”

Peter, Peter. Maybe Peter had ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). The Gospels sure portray him as one who often could have benefited by additional focus and thought. This is Peter who first thinks Jesus is a ghost as He walks on the water at night amid the wind and waves. Jesus tells the disciples in the boat to take heart, and not be afraid. So Peter tests Him and says, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” (Mt. 14:28) Peter hops out and walks on the water, but then sees the wind and becomes afraid. He begins to sink and calls out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus does. This is Peter who rightly confesses, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Mt. 16:16) Peter who offered to make tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the mount of Transfiguration. Peter who sought to understand forgiveness by asking Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother when he sins against him. This is Peter who along with the other disciples left everything to follow Jesus. Peter, who after the Last Supper had ended says to Jesus, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you,” right after Jesus tells him that before the rooster crows he will deny him three times. (Mt. 26:35) This is Peter who falls asleep while Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter, who at Jesus’ betrayal in that garden takes out his short sword and lifts it up to keep his confession to Jesus from earlier that night that he would die with Jesus. But Jesus doesn’t let him. Jesus stops the bloodshed that night and puts Malchus’ ear back in its place after Peter had struck him and cut it off. Bold Peter who at the accusation of but a lowly servant girl denies for the third time even knowing the Man—Jesus. The rooster crows, Peter remembers Jesus’ words, and he goes out and weeps bitterly. Bold Peter, once willing to make tents for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus so that he might remain with them, fades into the background when Jesus is striped and lifted up on the cross. Peter sticks around though and when the women come back and report the news of the Resurrection the other disciples didn’t believe them, but Peter rose and ran to the tomb.

St. Peter loved the Lord Jesus. It was he who said to Jesus, “Lord to whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life.” (Jn. 6:68) Yet Peter faltered and failed as a follower of Jesus. The words of Jesus were likely echoing in his ears after the rooster crowed. Jesus had said, “whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” (Mt. 10:33) The remembrances of all the miracles that Peter saw firsthand, the compassion of his Lord, the Love of his Lord, the words of his Lord, the small faith that his Lord worked in St. Peter kept him living in hope for his Lord. Peter’s hope came true and Jesus came back to him and reinstated him with the command to feed and tend His sheep and lambs as he follows Jesus.

There is a bit of St. Peter in all of us. We may have fished with no success one night then caught our limit the next, walked on water (ice) for a while then fallen through it, or even denied our Lord through our words and actions, but our stories are certainly different than his. One very important thing in common though is our common love and faith in the One who has the words of eternal life.

Our love for the One who died to take away our sins doesn’t save. But His love for sinners does. The size nor the strength of our faith in the One who overcame death and the grave doesn’t change the reality that a little faith is still a saving faith. Jesus never said that St. Peter had a great faith. No, in fact, quite the opposite. Five times in the Gospel of Matthew he calls St. Peter and the other disciples, “little faith ones.” The Canaanite woman who persisted in her pleading mercy for her daughter is the only one who receives Jesus’ mention of great faith. Faith in Jesus as the only savior from sin, saves. Period. With St. Peter, we can thank God little faith still saves. That’s a very good thing to put your hope in.

We know a bit more about St. Peter from the book of Acts and his epistles of first and second Peter. He likely died under the persecution of Roman Emperor Nero around 67 AD, thirty some years after Jesus predicted how St. Peter would die. Imagine that? Thirty plus years of living under the cloud of knowing how you would die.

You all know that you will die at some point. You hope for a good, long life, but at the same time, do you hope for a blessed death? The hopes and dreams of this life are not the end. Jesus has showed you that by His resurrection from what should have been the end. Will you waiver and doubt the words of Jesus as your death approaches? Probably. St. Peter denied his Lord and ran away when God’s will revealed got a little hard for him handle. But thanks be to God the Lord didn’t run away from Him but came to him, spoke to him, forgave him, fed him, and called out to Peter again and again, “Follow me.”

St. Peter didn’t have an easy life by any means, nor did St. Paul, or Luke or Matthew or Mark or John or Philip or Andrew or Bartholomew or any of the rest of the disciples of Jesus. They were never promised and easy life by being followers of Jesus. No, quite the opposite. In this world they faced many hardships, persecutions, dangers, even the sword because they, in their little faith’s, dared to keep following Jesus. Now they enjoy an eternal rest and have received the victor’s crown of life everlasting with Jesus. They counted all the hopes and dreams of this world as nothing compared to the hope of the life to come, which was theirs in Christ Jesus.

Every time you confess the Apostles creed, the last words you confess are good, right, and salutary. You state that you believe in “resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.” The confession of that eternal reality is meant to keep you grounded in the hope of the life to come in the midst the of dashed hopes and dreams of this life. Precious few things ever go just as you hope and even fewer dreams come true. But amid all that constant disappointment and perpetual challenge is the ever endless call of your savior to you, “Come, follow me”. With Him you will be challenged. With Him you will be pushed. But with Him you will never be left all alone without any help nor without any hope.

On this Confirmation Sunday, may you continue to hear the words of your risen Lord Jesus say to you, “Follow me. You follow me.” And like St. Peter, with his little faith, follow Him and His words even unto death for the sake of your life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.