

St. James Lutheran Church  
Easter III  
April 18, 2010  
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First Reading: Acts 9:1-6  
Second Reading: Revelation 5:11-14  
Gospel: John 21:1-19

### Show Me

Each week our worship service ends with a commissioning. The parting directive is:

“Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”

Sometimes this directive is more specific:

“Go in peace to follow Christ, make disciples and live the gospel.”

Yet the essential message is unchanged: “Go in peace and serve.”

Now in response, we certainly do “go” – everybody leaves. I’m often the last one out of here on Sundays, so trust me – everyone goes somewhere. And I suspect that many, if not all, go in peace. We go in peace: our sins forgiven, having heard God’s word, having been fed at His table. We go, reassured of God’s grace, reminded that Christ is alive and with us, supported by the fellowship of believers, our friends in Christ. If we have been paying attention, we can go in peace.

Do we go to serve the Lord? That is, upon leaving this place, this blessed and gracious time of peace – do we actually manage to:

follow Christ?  
make disciples?  
live the gospel?

We’d have to say: “Not exactly.” “Not completely.” Not as we ought.”

If we managed to serve the Lord faithfully and completely, we might never need to come back. Yet we know we will be here next Sunday, admitting our shortcomings and failures: not loving God with our whole heart, not loving our neighbors as ourselves. We know going out the door that we will fall short. We realize we won’t get it right 100% of the time. The question is, knowing this to be so, do we even bother to try?

At the start of his ministry, Jesus commissioned four fishermen to be his disciples. The orders were brief and concise: “Follow me.” And they did. Not perfectly. Sometimes reluctantly. Sometimes at a distance. Sometimes rather awkwardly. But they did it. They followed Jesus. After three years of following, they came to the whirlwind of that final week in Jerusalem. At the Last Supper Jesus gave them a number of final instruction. He washed their feet and told them to do likewise. Then in a span of less than 24 hours, Jesus was arrested, abused, crucified and buried. The disciples were left dazed and confused and grieving. Then on Sunday they were stunned again by news of Christ’s resurrection. Their heads were spinning!

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After all this emotional commotion, Peter decides to get out of town. He decides to go fishing. He wanted to do something familiar, something ordinary, something he knew how to

do, something he was doing before Jesus first came and said, “Follow me.” Peter had followed Jesus through many ups and downs. That last week had been a serious “downer.” At the last supper, Peter had sworn his allegiance to Jesus, saying, “I will never forsake you.” Yet before the sun came up the next day, Peter denied three times that he even knew who Jesus was. He failed miserably in the clutch.

By the end of that fateful week Peter had to be tired, both physically and emotionally, confused and guilty. Is it any wonder that he wanted to get away, to be left alone? So he went fishing back home in Galilee. The fishing wasn’t great. In fact, after trying all night, they had caught nothing. After getting skunked all night, who could that be in early morning light standing on shore and calling out to them? It was the Lord. Once again, Jesus had come to the lake shore, seeking them out. He shows them where the fish are. He fixes breakfast for the whole crew.

You know, we’re all familiar with the “Last Supper” – I wonder why we never speak of the “First Breakfast?” That’s what this was. This was the first day of the rest of their lives. Jesus fixes breakfast, letting them know that the great adventure isn’t over – it’s just getting started.

After breakfast, Jesus has a on-on-one with Peter. Peter may want to be left alone, but Jesus has something else in mind. Three times Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” And each time Peter affirms that he does, Jesus tells him: “Feed my lambs – tend my sheep – take care of my flock.” He calls Peter to serve. And he goes on to explain to Peter what it will cost: “You will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go . . .” The price of faithfulness will be the same for Peter as it was for Jesus. It will cost everything. And then Jesus repeats the first words he ever spoke to Peter: “Follow me.” – those simple and compelling words.

For us, Peter is the sure reminder that God uses ordinary, imperfect people. It seems that is who God prefers to use! We can see ourselves in Peter’s mood swings, his failure to follow through, his guilt and inadequacy, his desire to be left alone, to be done with it all. Yet just as he came looking for Peter, Jesus seeks us out:

- He meets us as we are.
- He prepares a meal for us.
- He forgives us and gives us his peace.
- He cares for us – and he commissions us to care for others.
- He calls us to serve, by following him, making disciples, and living the gospel.

And so we do. I’ve seen the many ways you answer the call to serve:

- Visiting the sick.
- Parenting your sons and daughters.
- Giving generously.
- Serving on council and committees.
- Teaching the children here and at A.J. Katzenmeier.
- Feeding the hungry.
- Sharing peace and forgiveness.
- Making this a community where people can see Christ is alive.

The challenge, of course, is to keep on serving:

- even when we get tired.
- even when we get it wrong.
- even when we are criticized.
- even when no one seems to notice
- even when we have done more than our share.
- even when we wonder if it makes a difference.
- even when others don't pitch in .
- even when we'd prefer to just be left alone.

Truth is, you and I will never be done serving, because there will always be: sheep that need feeding, young lambs that need tending, lost sheep that need reclaiming, wounded sheep that need healing, lazy sheep that need prodding, frightened sheep that need encouraging, straying sheep that need guiding.

Jesus asks a simple, straightforward question: “Do you love me?”

When we answer, “Of course we love you, Jesus.”

He says to us, firmly and lovingly: “Show me.”

Amen