

St. John, Apostle & Evangelist

St. John 21:19-24: "We Live and Work by the Lord's Will."

December 26/27, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, gracious Father, who in the fullness of time sent Your Son to become man, to assume human flesh like ours and become our Brother, we thank You for Your truth and Your fatherly goodness in giving us this Savior. By His birth, death, and resurrection, we are delivered from sin, death, Satan, and hell. We beseech You, keep us until the end in true knowledge of our Redeemer, that with the holy angels, we may rejoice at His nativity, and on the Last Day, when He comes again, we may behold Him, together with You and the Holy Spirit, in glory and majesty, world without end. Amen. (*Lutheran Book of Prayer*, 2005 ed., p. 122)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus] said to [Peter], "Follow Me." / Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to Him and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray You?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" / Jesus said to him, "If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" / This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who became one with us that He might share in all our pain and troubles and give us a share of His grace and glory, dear fellow redeemed:

Did you have a *fair* Christmas? I'm not asking if it was about average, or if it was okay given the circumstances. I'm wondering if it was fair—balanced—equal. In other words, did Christmas turn out like you thought it should? Did you get what you believed you deserved? Were the gifts you got in line with the gifts others got?

We are good at making sure things stay fair. Or at least we react when things do not seem fair. Behind that is a certain entitlement, a certain expectation, that we should get at least as much as others do. And of course that leaves us open to jealousy, not just in the area of Christmas gifts, but in all areas.

So we might think it isn't fair that we have had so many health problems, while others hardly ever visit the doctor. It isn't fair to be stuck in a difficult marriage or to deal with impossible relatives, while others seem to have perfectly happy relationships. It isn't fair that we have had to deal with so much loss and death, while others have endured little hardship.

But who is supposed to determine what is fair and what isn't? What gives us the idea that we should expect a care-free life? What makes us think we deserve only good things? We learn something about fairness from today's text which details an interaction with Jesus, Peter, and John.

But first a little context is needed. Today's reading comes at the very end of the Gospel according to St. John. By this point, Jesus had been crucified, died, and was buried. Then He had risen again and appeared to the eleven disciples. He had visited them at least a couple of times, and now John writes about His appearance to seven of them at the Sea of Galilee. The disciples hadn't caught any fish during the night when Jesus called from the shore that they should "*cast the net on the right side of the boat*" (Joh. 21:6). Then they caught such a large number of fish that they couldn't haul it in.

When they had gotten to shore, Jesus spoke to Peter about his three-fold denial of Jesus in the temple courtyard. Having forgiven Peter, Jesus commissioned him to feed His lambs and sheep. But He also told him that he would have a cross to bear: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go*" (v. 18). This "stretching out of his hands" seems to indicate that he would die like Jesus did, on a cross. According to church tradition, this is what happened to Peter some decades later.

After Jesus said this, He told Peter to "follow Him," which is the beginning of today's text. It was then that Peter turned and saw John and asked, "*Lord, what about this man?*" Now we don't know what exactly prompted Peter's question. He could have simply been curious, wondering if all the disciples would meet the same fate as him. Or he could have been concerned, hoping that John would not have to face what he would. Or maybe he felt he was being chastised for his earlier denials, and he wondered if John, who obviously had the Lord's favor, would fare better.

We can't forget the rivalry the disciples had among themselves about who was the greatest. They had argued about it more than once (Luk. 9:46, 22:24). On another occasion, James and John and their mother approached Jesus to ask if the two boys could sit at Jesus' right and left hands in glory. That did not sit well with the other disciples (Mar. 10:35-41). Then Peter boasted the night before Jesus' death that even if the other disciples fell away from Jesus, he never would (Mat. 26:33).

The disciples were just like us – sinners. They expected to be rewarded for the sacrifices they were making for Jesus. They were jealous for the glory that could be theirs in His kingdom. They each thought they deserved no less than the other disciples, and each of them probably thought he deserved more.

It is not difficult for us to understand this. Like those disciples, we also think we have done a good job of serving the Lord, and we expect that our devotion to Him should result in good things for us. When we don't think we have been rewarded by Him like we should be, that's when a spiritual crisis happens. That's when we question His love for us. We wonder if He is

punishing us. We decide this is proof that He does not care about us. He hasn't done what we expected Him to do.

Our crisis becomes all the more intense when we see others around us doing well and living happy lives. "Why should they have it so good?" we think. "They are not nearly as faithful as I am. Why do they have it easy when I am suffering?" We can even get to where we resent others and the blessings they have. We avoid them or treat them rudely because their happiness just makes us feel worse.

This comparison game is no good. Neither is our entitlement mentality. Whatever prompted Peter to ask about John, Jesus replied, *"If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"* Jesus could give the same response to us in our jealousy and discontent: *"If it is My will that others prosper more than you or have fewer hardships, what is that to you? You follow Me!"*

The reality is that no one's so-called "successful" life is as happy or as idyllic as it seems on the outside. Wouldn't you like to have that job? Wouldn't you like to live in that house? Wouldn't you like to drive that car? Wouldn't you like to have that marriage and that family? But no one's life is perfect, and the rich do not have fewer cares than the poor – often the opposite is true.

Our call from God is not to put ourselves in a position of judgment about what He does. It is not to cry foul when things don't seem fair. Our calling is to be content with what He gives us. Sometimes He gives us more and sometimes less. Sometimes He gives us success and sometimes trials. But whatever He gives, He gives because it is right for us. The Lord has never wronged us, and He never will.

That's a strong statement. Do you feel you have always gotten a fair shake from God? Well it's true, you haven't gotten a fair shake. What's fair is that God should reward you for what you have done. And what have you done? You have broken His Commandments. Time and again, you have done the exact opposite of what He tells you to do. What you deserve is His punishment. You deserve eternal death. That would be fair.

But that is not what you get. Instead of getting judgment, you get grace. Instead of getting condemnation, you get forgiveness. Instead of getting death, you get life. The proof of God's love for you is found in a little manger in Bethlehem. That is where God's Son lay wrapped in human flesh. God did not want you to have hell; He wanted you to have heaven. So He sent down His only-begotten Son to win the victory for you over your sin, death, and the devil.

The Lord Jesus did not come to get what He deserved. He deserved perfect honor, obedience, and love from everyone on earth. Instead He received suffering, spite, and hatred from mankind. He willingly accepted what He did not deserve, so He could make atonement for everyone's sins. In all humility, He was laid in a manger and then nailed to a cross, so that you would be saved, so that you would have the sure hope of a perfect, care-free, glorious life after this one.

John writes that the other disciples took Jesus' words to mean that John would not die: *"If it is My will that he remain until I come,"* said Jesus, *"what is that to you?"* But Jesus did not say that

John would not die. He was teaching Peter and the other disciples not to worry about comparisons or fairness or anything else. Jesus' call to all of His disciples is to follow Him wherever He leads us in this life.

We know He will not lead us into sin or destruction. He is leading us to heaven. Whatever we must face while we are here on earth, we face it in Him. He became one with us at Christmas. He tied our future to His and His future to ours. And the future we have in Him is a glorious one, even if we must suffer here as Jesus suffered.

According to tradition, Peter and the other disciples were all martyred for confessing Jesus as the Lord and Savior—all except for John. John far outlived them. But His days were hard. He watched false teachers make inroads in the Christian Church. He saw many deny Christ and follow the desires of their flesh. Finally he was exiled to live alone on the island of Patmos. It was not all glory for John. But **he lived and worked by the Lord's will.**

And so do we. We entrust our life to the Lord's care, and we carry out the tasks He has given us to do in our homes, our workplaces, and our community. We follow Jesus through all. In good days or bad we remember God's love for us, that He sent His only-begotten Son to be our Savior. With John we give thanks that *"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (Joh. 1:14).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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