

Dear followers of the Light,

Have you ever played the game “Follow the Leader?” Let me jar your memory... ♦ For those who don’t know, the game consists of one person who is the leader and the rest of the players are followers. The leader does something and the rest of the group follows along, doing exactly what the leader does. This game is a lot of fun on one condition: if you are the leader, at least once in a while. I mean, nobody wants to just follow all of the time, right?

But in our text for today, Jesus says *Follow Me!* and this time it’s not a game. Now, whenever somebody asks you to follow, there are usually three questions that pop into your head: 1) Why? 2) Where? 3) How? So today I’d like you to consider those questions as we see why it is so important for Jesus to always be the leader. And as we...

How many of you have ever tried walking around in the dark? If you do it long enough you’re bound to run into something and get hurt. Well, we were all in the dark at one time—the darkness of sin and unbelief. That’s why Jesus came into the world—to shed some light on us. More than 700 years after Isaiah told the people of Israel that a great light was coming to Zebulun. Jesus moves from Nazareth to Galilee, the former territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, and the prophesy of Isaiah chapter 9 is fulfilled! ***Land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali...along the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned.*** (Isaiah 9:1-2)

So Jesus moves his ministry into Galilee, into a place, and for a people, rooted in darkness. Yes, Jesus is indeed the Son of God who comes into our darkness and brings light. We who are held hostage in our own homes...we who sit in the darkness oppressed by the enemy of sin,

death and the power of the devil...we have just had the lights turned on.

I remember, while growing up, trying to pick up large rocks and fallen logs. ♦ I liked seeing the hundreds of creatures living in the darkness under those rocks and logs scurrying to get back to the darkness. You see, they had been exposed to the light. But they hated the light. They tried to hide from the light. Not unlike Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden who ran for cover after the fall into sin. ♦

Well, our light, Jesus Christ has come. And now he says to each of us *Follow Me!* But too often, like those bugs exposed to the light, we try to run and hide, don’t we? By nature, we hate the light. By nature we don’t want to follow anyone. We want to lead!

But remember, we’re in the dark. We can’t see where we’re going. If we were to take the lead...well you know where we’d end up. Or what if we tried to follow someone other than Jesus, other than the true Light? Where would we end up then?

We’d be like that lady in a *Reader’s Digest* story who got lost while driving home in a blinding snowstorm. She remembered what her father had once told her, “If you are ever lost in a snowstorm, wait for a snowplow and follow it.” ♦

Well, pretty soon a snowplow came by, so she pulled in behind it and followed it for almost an hour. Finally the driver stopped, got out of his truck, walked back to her car, and asked what she was doing. She explained that her father had told her to follow a snowplow if she was ever lost in a snowstorm. “Okay,” he said. “I’ve finished with the Wal-Mart lot. Now you can follow me over to Kmart.”

Yeah, that’s what we’d be like if we tried to lead from our darkness. Going around in circles for years on end, ending up nowhere, smashing into every pit and trap the devil has laid for us. So why do we keep trying to follow someone or something other than the true Light? Why do we keep following our sinful desires? Why do we continue to think that we can get to heaven ourselves or by some other means? Why do

we keep running from the Light, not wanting to be told what to do or where to go? ♦

No, my friends, stop trying to lead! Stop trying to follow someone or something else! Stop following your sinful desires! Follow the Light! And follow him first to the cross.

During the Civil War, near Palmyra, Missouri, a company of Confederate irregulars known as “Bushwackers” were arrested by Union soldiers. Because they were guerilla fighters and not in uniform, they were not recognized as prisoners of war but were sentenced to be shot. A courageous boy in the Union army touched his commanding officer’s arm and pleaded, “*Standing at the end of the line is a man I know, he has 10 children and if you shoot him today you will make an orphan out of ten little boys and girls. Do you believe one can take the place of another? If so, I would like to take his place.*” The officer hesitated but finally consented. The husband and father was released, and the boy took the man’s place in the firing line. ♦ Not long after the war a man went to the cemetery where Willy was buried and placed the tombstone that can still be seen today at his grave. It says...*Here lies the body of Willy Lear, the man who died for me.*

Follow Jesus to the cross because that is where he took *your* place. ♦ It was upon that cross that our Lord and Savior, the Light of the World, took your sin, your darkness upon himself and gave you, in return, his light. And now through his resurrection he blazes a trail, smashing down the wall of sin and death that blocked your entrance into heaven. His is the only path to heaven. He’s done all the work. He’s done what you couldn’t. And now he stands on that blazed trail and says to you *Follow Me!* He’s even taken your hands, placed them on his hips and started leading.

In our Gospel lesson for today, when Jesus asked Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him look at not only what they did, but how they did it. ***Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*** These disciples didn’t offer any excuses. They didn’t say, “In a minute.” They didn’t even bother to

say good-bye to anyone. They just followed and hung on for dear life. Why? Because they had seen the promised Light and he changed them.

You see, that’s what happens when you realize that you’ve been caught in the light of our Savior’s love. He called you; he sought you out; he made you his own. He forgave you, and he loved you. And now he says to each one of you whose lives have been changed: *Follow Me!*

And so we no longer ask “Why?” We no longer bemoan the fact that we’re only followers. We just drop everything and immediately follow, hanging on to his hips for dear life. And I know, that hip thing sounds kind of odd, but...

There was a field covered with forty inches of freshly fallen snow. A father and a son enter the field. As they walk across the field, the father blazes a path through the deep snow, and his son follows directly behind, hanging onto his hips, making a special effort to step in his father’s footprints, for he knows that the snow is deeper than he is tall. And if he were to let go of his father, he’d be stuck. But as you might imagine, it’s tough hanging on. Yet every time the boy falls, every time he stumbles, every time he trips, every time his grip slips, the father turns around, picks him up and gently places him back into his footprints. And guess what...after the two have crossed the field, how many sets of footprints are visible in the snow. ♦

The Christian life is that way. In our daily walk we follow Christ—in every thing we do, in everything we say, in everything we think. Oh, we may stumble along the way. We may let go of Jesus’ hips once in awhile to scratch an itch and end up getting stuck. But when we do, we quickly cry out, calling on our baptismal grace, seeking his forgiveness, and rejoicing as Jesus sets us back in his footprints. And every time he turns around, picks us up and gently places back in his footprints. So join the fun. Leave the world behind. Follow him. And walk in his steps as children of the Light. **AMEN.**

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