

FOLLOWING JESUS, OUR GREATEST GIVER
A Lenten Midweek Sermon Series

At the request of the Central Illinois District Stewardship Commission I prepared this sermon series to help support the District's 2019-2020 stewardship education emphasis, "Bring Giving Home." These sermons focus on our Lord Jesus and what He gave in His Passion and call His people to follow Him accordingly.

For each sermon I have included for your consideration suggestions for a Psalm, other Scripture readings, and hymns (from LSB and TLH). I have also included below a schedule of Passion readings from the four Gospels. (I prefer to read through the entire Passion narrative of one of the Gospels each year for the Lenten midweek services. You could use these any year, of course.)

The sermons need not be preached in the order they are listed. They are suitable for use in a Circuit preaching rotation, if desired.

Feel free to alter, adapt, or polish up any of these sermons as you find beneficial. I understand how difficult it is to preach a sermon someone else has written. Hopefully, however, at least a few pastors will find some of the themes, outlines, or ideas helpful. And certainly, no credit (or blame) needs to be given me for any of this work; it is all offered freely in the service of the Lord Jesus and His people.

- Pastor Daniel Bishop, St. John's Lutheran Church, Pekin, Illinois

A suggested theme passage for the entire series: "I have given you an example, that you should do just as I have done for you." John 13:15

The Four Passion Narratives divided into six readings for the Lenten midweek services:

Matthew

26:1-30
26:31-46
26:47-75
27:1-26
27:27-54
27:55-66

Mark

14:1-26
14:27-42
14:43-72
15:1-20
15:21-41
15:42-47

Luke

22:1-23
22:24-38
22:63 – 23:12
23:13-38
23:39-56

John

13:1-20
13:21-38
18:1-27
18:28-40
19:1-16
19:17-42

Lenten Midweek 1: Mark 14: 3-9, especially v 3,6, & 8

"FOLLOWING JESUS IN GENEROSITY"

(for series: "Following Jesus, Our Greatest Giver")

"And while He was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He was reclining at table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very expensive perfume of genuine nard. And she broke the alabaster flask and poured it out on His head. ...But Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. Why are you causing her trouble? She has done a beautiful work for Me. ...She did what she could; she took it upon herself beforehand to anoint My body for burial.'"

Our dear Lord Jesus rebuked those who so lovelessly criticized the woman for pouring the expensive perfume on His head. They accused her of reckless waste, even implying she was negligent in her care for the poor. But Jesus both defended and commended the woman. "Leave her alone. Why are you causing her trouble? She has done a beautiful work for Me."

Anointing Jesus with this expensive perfume was not at all a waste, but a generous and loving gift for the Lord. It truly was a beautiful work! For the woman's gift was very expensive; it could have been sold for more than 300 denarii, her critics said. If we are right in assuming a denarius was the standard day's wage for a laborer, this perfume was worth about what a laborer would earn in a whole year! That's a very generous gift. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the purchase of this perfume used up most or all her life savings!

Her work was beautiful also because she gave her gift freely. No one forced or pressured her to do this. Quite to the contrary, she received a scolding for giving so freely. But she chose to honor Jesus with this expensive gift just because that's what she wanted to do.

Jesus commended the woman's work also because He knew it was a gift of love. Mark's account doesn't disclose the identity of this woman, but John's Gospel tells us the one who poured the perfume on Jesus was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. (Jn. 12:3) This

is the same Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His word when He was a house guest. Mary was a dear friend, whom Jesus loved (Jn. 11:5); and clearly, she loved Him. So, a very generous gift was in order, as far as she was concerned. How could she hold back from giving to the One she loved? And what gift could be too good for the One who loved her?

Mary's work was beautiful especially because she did it for such a good purpose – to anoint Jesus' body beforehand for burial. You see, this was the burial custom of that time: to wash the person's body, anoint the body with perfume or spices, and wrap the body in cloth. So, this was actually a pre-burial preparation. Jesus said, “She took it upon herself beforehand to anoint My body for burial.” Mary's beautiful work suggests she had understood Jesus' words when He foretold His impending death, (for Jesus had told the women, too – Lk. 24:6-7), and that she had taken His words to heart. Maybe she thought this might just be her last chance to honor Jesus with this special gift. So, she poured out the precious perfume on her precious Savior.

By this early anointing of Jesus' body for burial, Mary's generous gift actually pointed forward to a far more generous gift – to the gift our Lord Jesus gave when He offered Himself into death. And that's the most generous gift of all! Mary's gift was very generous, worth 300 denarii or more. But Jesus' gift was vastly more generous, of truly priceless value! For Jesus gave far more than perfume or jewels or silver or gold; He gave His precious blood – the blood of the Son of God! The Man, who is God, gave His entire self into death for us – all His righteousness, all His obedience, all His divine goodness, His pure and holy body – He gave it all.

He, too, gave freely, voluntarily. Though wicked men arrested Him, falsely accused Him, unjustly condemned Him, and crucified Him, no one *forced* Jesus to suffer and die. Rather, He humbled Himself and chose to give His life as an act of His own will. “No one takes My life

from Me; I lay it down of Myself.” (Jn. 10:18)

And who can match Jesus' gift when it comes to love? His generous gift is the supreme expression of divine love. “Christ loved us and gave Himself for us.” (Eph. 5:2) “In this we know love, that He lay down His life for us.” (1 Jn. 3:16) His free and loving generosity make Jesus' gift the most beautiful work of all!

Jesus gave His life also for a good purpose- the best purpose: the salvation of the world! Mary's gift pointed forward to Jesus' death and burial; Jesus' gift is the real thing. He gave His body into death to atone for all our sins and gain forgiveness for all mankind. Be certain of this, brothers and sisters: because of Jesus' generous giving, your sins are forgiven, period. The devil may accuse you of sin. Other people may lovelessly criticize you and find fault with you. Your own conscience may point out your offenses against God and condemn you for them. But God has pardoned you fully for the sake of Jesus' gift. He has laid all your transgressions aside. God now defends you as His own dear child and commends you for the beautiful works you do out of faith in Him.

And those beautiful works include your generosity as you follow the Lord Jesus. Our Savior calls us to this, you understand – to follow Him in generosity. “I have given you an example, that just as I have done for you, you also should do.” (Jn 13:15) We cannot give our lives for the salvation of the world, of course. Praise God, that job's already done! But with hearts full of thanksgiving for what Jesus has given us, we most certainly can follow Jesus' example of generous giving. And this is not merely an example alone, but also our Lord's command. “The one who contributes, (let him give) in generosity.” (Rom. 12:8)

So, when we give to help others who are in need, and when we bring offerings to the Lord, we should strive to heed His command and follow the pattern He has established for us. Jesus did not give us leftovers, did He? He gave His best. So, we should not give leftovers,

either, but the first and best of what He has given us. Jesus did not give as an afterthought, but according to the plan of salvation God established from the foundation of the world. So, when it comes to our offerings to the Lord, we should make a thoughtful plan to give generously, in proportion to the way He has blessed us. Like the Macedonian Christians, who gave according to their ability, and even beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8:3), we can and should give a generous portion of the income that God provides us to honor the Lord.

So also, we should give freely, just as Jesus gave freely for us. There is to be no compulsion involved in our works of love and our offerings to the Lord. Nor do we give grudgingly, but freely and cheerfully because we want to out of thanksgiving - "each as he purposes in his heart," as the Lord says. (2 Cor. 9:7) There is no New Testament ceremonial law involved here. Rather, we are free to give as generously as our Savior has given for us!

In the same way, our Lord teaches us to give generously out of love – love for Him and for our neighbor. Genuine love is always love indeed (1 Jn. 3:18) – love such as Mary showed Jesus – love such as Jesus showed us all. It is love that sees our neighbor in need and gives generously to help him. It is love that hears the word of the Lord and does what He says. If we truly love, we give generously. If we give without love, our giving is not truly following Jesus.

Finally, we follow Jesus in generosity when we give for a good purpose, to thank the Lord and support His gospel ministry and other works of mercy. The people of Israel gave generously for the service of God's gospel purposes, to construct and support the operation of the tabernacle. For that was the place where the Lord received the Old Testament sacrifices, through which He bestowed the forgiveness of sins on His people. So, they gave abundantly, so abundantly they had to be told to stop giving! (Ex. 36:5-6) In the same way, we should bring generous offerings to support the Lord's work of bestowing His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation right here in this place through the preaching and teaching of His word, Baptism,

and the Lord's Supper; also to support the Lord's work of caring for those who are poor and needy. Those are very fine, God-pleasing purposes for generous giving.

Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus was right. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what Mary did for Him has been told in memory of her. We just heard it right here. And as we remember her beautiful generosity in anointing Jesus beforehand for burial, we remember all the more our Lord's supreme generosity in giving His life for our forgiveness and everlasting salvation. With thankful hearts, then, may we all rededicate ourselves to following Him in generosity.

Sermon Outline:

- I. The woman was generous in pouring expensive perfume on Jesus.
- II. Her gift pointed to Jesus' death, the most generous gift of all.
- III. Jesus calls us to follow Him in generosity.

Suggested Readings: Exodus 36:1-7 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 Mark 14:1-9

Suggested Psalm: Psalm 51

Suggested Hymns:

Jesus, I Will Ponder Now	LSB 440/TLH 140
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross	LSB 425/TLH 175
Christ, the Life of All the Living	LSB 420/TLH 151
Lord of All Good	LSB 786
To Our Redeemer's Glorious Name	TLH 363
Savior, Thy Dying Love	TLH 403
I Gave My Life for Thee	TLH 405

Lenten Midweek 2: Matthew 26:14-16

“FOLLOWING JESUS IN THE RIGHT USE OF OFFICE”
(for series: “Following Jesus, Our Greatest Giver”)

“Then one of the Twelve, the one called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I hand Him over to you?' And they set out for him thirty pieces of silver. And from then he started seeking a good opportunity to hand Him over.”

God had been very good to Judas Iscariot and the chief priests. He placed them in important and honorable offices, entrusting them with duties necessary for the people's everlasting well-being. The Lord called Judas as an apostle, one of the twelve men He specially trained and sent out to preach the good news of God's kingdom. The Lord placed the chief priests into the holy priesthood of Israel, the sacred office in which they were to teach the people, intercede for them, and offer the sacrifices through which the Lord bestowed upon them the forgiveness of sins.

Sadly, however, Judas and the chief priests all misused their offices. Judas was dishonest and greedy. John tells us he was a thief; he had the disciples' moneybag and would take what was put into it. (Jn. 12:6) So in his greed he went to the chief priests and asked them what they were willing to give him if he handed Jesus over to them. They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and Judas started looking for a good opportunity to betray the Lord. And you all know how it turned out. Before long, Judas found his chance to hand Jesus over to the armed agents of the chief priests under the cover of darkness in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was a key link in the chain of events that led to the unjust condemnation and crucifixion of our Savior.

Obviously, this entire arrangement between Judas and the chief priests was sinful. Just think, in the course of his apostolic training, Judas had become intimately familiar with Jesus, so much so that our Lord called him “My close friend in whom I trusted.” (Ps. 41:9/Jn.

13:18) That was a good thing. But Judas used that close familiarity with Jesus, not to tell others about Him for their salvation, but to betray Him to His enemies.

The chief priests likewise misused their office, not to mention their money. Instead of serving the Lord for the blessing of His people in the sacred duties entrusted to them, the chief priests conspired against the Lord in a wicked attempt to get rid of Him forever. And they used the money He had entrusted to them – and where the money came from matters little; it all belonged to the Lord – they used that money with the intention of serving their own evil purposes, not the Lord's loving purposes. So, Judas and the chief priests forever stand as decidedly bad examples for us, in that they selfishly misused the important offices to which God had called them. Clearly, we do not want to be like them!

On the other hand, “consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, who was faithful to the One who appointed Him.” (Heb. 3:1-2) Unlike Judas and the chief priests, Jesus used His high and honorable offices rightly! For our Lord Jesus is the supreme Apostle, sent by His Father to speak His word and carry out His saving works. And that is exactly what Jesus did. He never used His office selfishly or for evil purposes, but to do the will of Him who sent Him, always for the good of others.

Jesus was far closer to His Father than Judas ever was to Him. And Jesus used that divine intimacy to make the Father known to us, by His words and by His works. By His teaching discourses and parables, by His countless miracles of mercy, and chiefly by His voluntary suffering and death on the cross, the Father's Apostle has shown us that God truly is good and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. He forgives us poor sinners for the sake of His mercy in His Son, and earnestly desires us to live with Him forever. Because of Jesus' faithfulness in His apostolic office, we know God rightly!

Jesus also bears the office of High Priest. He is our great High Priest forever! And

Jesus always used, and still uses, His priestly office in selfless love, for our salvation, just as His Father wills it. Jesus interceded for the forgiveness of those who were responsible for His crucifixion That includes you and me, because our sins necessitated His death on the cross. And as Priest forever, Jesus still pleads to His Father on our behalf for our everlasting blessing. Most importantly, Jesus offered Himself on the cross as the sacrifice that fully atoned for all our sins. And now, in His Holy Supper, He still gives us His body and blood, which He sacrificed once for all in His crucifixion, for the forgiveness of sins. Because of Jesus' faithfulness in His priestly office, we have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation!

As both Apostle and High Priest, then, Jesus always was and ever remains faithful, always doing the Father's will and serving for our salvation. Jesus forever stands as the perfect example in the right use of office. So, by all means, we do want to be like Him!

And Jesus actually calls us to this very thing – to follow Him in the right use of the various offices in which He has placed us. We are, after all, the Lord's servants and stewards in whatever offices He has entrusted to us. And, as God reminds us, “it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” (1 Cor. 4:2)

Now, the offices God has entrusted to us are simply the various stations in life in which He has placed us and given us responsibilities. And God has been very good to us in this, placing us all into honorable and important offices. You might remember how the Table of Duties section of our Small Catechism contains numerous Scripture passages for our various stations to admonish us concerning our office and service. And then it mentions several of them, such as the office of preachers, hearers of God's word, civil government, citizens, husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, employers, and so forth. These are the kinds of offices into which God has placed us, and He expects us to use them rightly – to be faithful as we function in them.

Earlier we heard examples from the Bible of the misuse of office, and then the perfect example of Jesus. We could point out other good examples from the Bible of people who used their offices rightly. These are encouraging for us, because they demonstrate that by the Lord's working in the lives of His people, ordinary believers really can be faithful in office.

Our reading from 2 Chronicles gave us the fine example of Jehoiada the high priest. He used his office to anoint and enthrone the rightful king of Judah, (little Joash,) to urge the people to be faithful to the Lord, to stamp out Baal worship, and to re-establish the proper priestly service in the house of the Lord – all after the reign of the wicked queen Athaliah. All this was in keeping with God's will, and for the blessing of His people.

We also heard from Acts 20 how Paul did what was right in his apostolic office, teaching the people the whole counsel of God, and giving them a good example of hard work and of helping the weak. He, too, carried out his office selflessly, as the Lord directed, and for the good of the people he served. Paul is another good example of the right use of office.

Now, we certainly cannot point out the details of what comprises faithfulness in every office the Lord may give us. Yet we can summarize the Lord's overarching guidance for any office we have like this: We should not be doing anything in our offices out of selfishness, or just because it's what we want to do. Rather, we should carry out the duties of our offices always in keeping with God's will as we learn it from the Scriptures, and we should do so in service to others. It's the same as always; God wants us to live in faith toward Him and in love for our neighbor. That means we strive to do what *He* says as we function in our offices, and we do so for the blessing of others.

This is following Jesus in the right use of office. And in view of His faithful service to us, how can we do any less?

Sermon Outline:

- I. Judas and the chief priests misused their offices.
- II. Jesus used His offices rightly.
- III. Jesus calls us to follow Him in the right use of the offices He has entrusted to us.

Suggested Readings: 2 Chronicles 23:16-21 Acts 20:17-21, 26-27, 32-35 Matthew 26:14-16

Suggested Psalm: Psalm 41

Suggested Hymns:

Glory Be to Jesus	LSB 433/TLH 158
We Sing the Praise of Him Who Died	LSB 429/TLH 178
O God, Thou Faithful God	LSB 696/TLH 395
Take My Life and Let it Be	LSB 783/TLH 400
Since Our Great High Priest, Christ Jesus	LSB 529
Christ Sits at God's Right Hand	LSB 564
Lord of All Good	LSB 786
Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go	LSB 854
Sweet the Moments, Rich in Blessings	TLH 155
Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken	TLH 423
My God, My Father, Make Me Strong	TLH 424

Lenten Midweek 3: John 13:14-15

“FOLLOWING JESUS IN HUMBLE SERVICE”

(for series: “Following Jesus, Our Greatest Giver”)

“If then I, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you.”

It was the evening before Jesus' death, the evening of the final Passover, and our Lord had made arrangements with His disciples to eat the supper in an upper room in Jerusalem. This is the setting in which John commented about our Lord: “...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end,” or we could say, “...to the complete extent.” (Jn. 13:1) Jesus then proceeded to demonstrate that complete love by His actions of humble service.

Our Lord got up and washed His disciples' feet, which was an act of loving, lowly service. John tells us that Jesus “rose from supper, laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.” (Jn. 13:4-5) Now, this was a menial task ordinarily done by the lowliest servant. To wash His disciples' feet like this was an act of loving and unselfish humility.

Yet as we listen carefully to Jesus' words in this portion of Scripture, we realize that He intended us to understand His action of washing the disciples' feet also as a *symbol* of loving and humble service. Specifically, the foot washing was symbolic of His supreme act of humble service in washing us clean from sin!

Jesus made this clear when He said to Peter, “If I do not wash you, you have no part in Me.” (13:8) Now, there's no Biblical indication anywhere that Jesus had ever washed

anyone's feet before this, and yet Peter and the other disciples and many other followers surely *did* have part in Jesus; they truly believed in Him. So, it wasn't the act of foot washing itself that made the difference. The washing from Jesus that really counted was the washing from sin, His gift of forgiveness. This was a greater cleansing, which the foot washing very nicely symbolized. That's how we have part with Jesus: by His humble service of cleansing us from sin!

Jesus reinforced this by saying, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you (*plural*) are clean, but not every one of you." (Jn 13:10) He wasn't talking about how much dirt someone had on his feet, was He? All the disciples except Judas were entirely clean, because Jesus had already washed them! He told them just a bit later that evening, "You are already clean on account of the word I have spoken to you." (15:3) Jesus had spoken to them the word of His pardon, the full and genuine pardon that was empowered by His impending death. They had received that word of pardon by faith in Jesus. So, they were wholly clean; all the guilt of all their sin was washed away!

You see, then, how the foot washing was symbolic of the great act of humble service Jesus was about to complete on the cross, where the real cleansing would take place. For Jesus' crucifixion is the effective cause, the real power for our cleansing from sin! God declares this truth throughout Holy Scripture. Zechariah foretold it well over 500 years beforehand: "On that day (the day when the Lord would be pierced, that is) a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and *for uncleanness*." (Zech. 13:1) In Revelation chapter 7, John described his vision of the multitude in heaven, "...who have *washed* their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:14) Again, we hear from Hebrews chapter 9: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who offered Himself without blemish to God, *cleanse* your conscience from dead

works to serve the living God.” (Heb. 9:14) And then we hear this beloved gem from 1 John 1: “The blood of Jesus His Son *cleanses* us from all sin.” (1 Jn. 1:7)

People of God, because Jesus shed His blood for you on the cross, you have been given a bath! Your sins are washed away! You too are wholly clean! Yes, because Jesus has washed you – cleansed you with His precious and pardoning blood – you *do* have part with Him. You have so much a part with Him that He even invites you to partake of that blood in His holy Supper, even as Peter and the others did that very evening. And that cleansing comes from Jesus' death, His greatest act of humble service. And all this is beautifully symbolized in the foot washing.

Now, by washing His disciples' feet, Jesus did not merely perform an *act* of great love and humble service. He did not merely give a *symbol* of His even greater service in washing away our sin. Jesus also gave an *example* of humble service. John's Gospel continues, “When He had washed their feet and put on His outer garments and resumed His place, He said to them, 'Do you understand what I have done for you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do just as I have done for you.’” (13:12-15)

The example Jesus gave us is not so much the specific act of washing someone's feet, but the humble spirit of loving servanthood in which He did it – the loving and lowly attitude that abounds in works of kindness. Jesus wants us and all His followers to emulate His love and thus to engage in all sorts of acts of humble and compassionate care and service for one another.

This, too, is part of being faithful stewards of what the Lord has entrusted to us. When Jesus said, “I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for

you,” He immediately added, “Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” (13:16-17) Jesus here reminds us very directly that He is our Master and we are His servants. And as servants, our desire should always be to do the will of our Master. The attitude of our heart should always be, “Lord, what do You want me to do? What do You want me to do with the time You have entrusted to me? What do You want me to do with the abilities You have given me?”

We have our Master's answer, don't we? “Do as I have done for you. Serve one another in loving humility.” You see, no act of service was below our Lord's dignity. He was willing to get down on His knees and help His disciples in whatever needs they had. That's the very spirit He wants us to have, as well, the spirit of loving servanthood for the good of others. Following Jesus' foot washing example means we will demonstrate our humble love by what we do to help and care for one another.

Here we have our Lord's guidance and direction from the Ten Commandments, and especially from the Second Table. We follow Jesus in humble service as we honor our father and mother and other authorities by speaking to them respectfully, obeying them, showing our appreciation by helpful deeds. We follow Jesus in humble service when we defend other people, speak up for unborn babies, take care of sick and disabled people, help people who are in need of food and clothing, and otherwise support them in their bodily needs. We follow Jesus in humble service as we live sexually pure and decent lives, demonstrating our true love and respect for each other, and as husbands and wives treat one another with love and honor. We follow Jesus in humble service when we treat other people with complete fairness, honesty, and integrity in our dealings with them, and when we help to improve and protect what belongs to them. We follow Jesus in humble service when speak truthfully and well of

others, assume the best about them in everything, and do whatever we can to protect and build up their reputation. We follow Jesus in humble service as we are thankful and content with what the Lord has given us, and therefore we are happy for others in their prosperity, we respect what the Lord has given them, and we do what we can to help their spouse or workers or animals stay with them.

Prompted by Jesus' lowly example, instructed by His Commandments, and empowered by His gift of washing from sin, we follow Jesus in humble service in the ordinary deeds of kindness we do for one another in our everyday callings. So, this evening, as once again we hear our Savior's word, which makes us clean, may we receive His cleansing with thanksgiving, and do as He has done for us.

Sermon Outline:

- I. Jesus gave His humble service in washing His disciples' feet, and in washing all His disciples clean from sin.
- II. We follow His example in humble service to others.

Suggested Readings: Zechariah 12:10 – 13:1 1 John 1:5-9 John 13:1-17

Suggested Psalm: Psalm 19:7-14 or Psalm 119:9-16

Suggested Hymns:

Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain	LSB 435/TLH 149
Drawn to the Cross, Which Thou Hast Blessed	LSB 560/TLH 390
Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me	LSB 761/TLH 376
O God of Mercy, God of Might	LSB 852/TLH 439
Lord of Glory, Who hast Bought Us	LSB 851/TLH 442
We Give Thee But Thine Own	LSB 781/TLH 441
Jesus, Greatest at the Table	LSB 446
Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way	LSB 857
Son of God, Eternal Savior	LSB 842
Lord, Whose Love through Humble Service	LSB 848
There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood	TLH 157

Lenten Midweek 4: John 18:36-37

“FOLLOWING JESUS IN THE GOOD CONFESSION”

(for series: Following Jesus, Our Greatest Giver”)

“Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'So then You are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, that I may bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.'”

When the apostle Paul was exhorting Timothy to a life of Christian faithfulness, he told him to “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” Paul solemnly directed him to do this, continuing, “I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of *Christ Jesus, who in His testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession*, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Tim. 6:12-14) Just as Christ Jesus had testified the good confession, openly declaring who He is and what He came to do, so Timothy had made the good confession of Christ. And now he was to keep on fighting the good fight of the faith, which necessarily included abiding in that good confession of Christ. This, brothers and sisters, is what our Lord desires and expects us all to do: follow Jesus in the good confession!

Paul said Christ Jesus testified the good confession *before Pontius Pilate*. This identifies our Savior's testimony before the Roman governor as an important and exemplary Christian confession. And, naturally, this good confession was about Jesus Himself. And what did our Lord say about Himself? Jesus plainly confessed He is a king. He repeatedly spoke of His kingdom, clearly implying He is a king. And when Pilate responded, “So then You are a

king?" Jesus affirmed it by answering, "You say that I am a king." That was an idiomatic way of saying, "That's right; I am a king."

Yet Jesus also made it clear He is no *ordinary* king. "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But now My kingdom is not from here." So, He is not a worldly king with worldly servants who fight with worldly weapons for worldly purposes. King Jesus does not engage in conventional battles to defend Himself.

Our Lord continued, "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, that I may bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice." King Jesus was indeed born; He is a real man, born of His mother Mary. Yet He is also the King who "came into the world" - who existed from eternity outside the world, but then came down from heaven and entered into the world. In other words, King Jesus is the eternal Son of God!

As such, our King exercises His reign not by the power of the sword, but by the power of His voice – by speaking the truth. "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, that I may bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice." So, our Savior's royal weapon is His word – His testimony to the truth.

And what is this truth to which King Jesus testifies? Well, our Lord identified *His Father's word* as the truth (17:17) – the divine message, which Jesus spoke. He also identified *Himself* as the truth (14:6), for Jesus is not only the Messenger but also the subject matter of the Father's word. When we listen to Jesus, we hear that the centerpiece and summary of the truth is this: **Jesus Christ is the Son of God, in whose name His believers have everlasting life.** That is Jesus' testimony to Himself – the core of the good confession.

You see, in Jesus' reign, His servants don't fight to keep Him from being arrested and killed. Rather, King Jesus willingly fought and died to save His servants! Our Lord fought

against the ruler of this world, the devil, and cast him out by being lifted up in His crucifixion. (12:31-33) In this way, by dying on the cross, Jesus forgave all our sins, nullifying the devil's accusations against us, and casting him out of power. The devil cannot condemn us for our sins and drag us down to hell with him. Jesus fought and defeated him, so that we are not delivered to everlasting death and damnation.

As a result, instead losing our life to our direst enemies, all of us who believe in Jesus have everlasting life! Our souls will never die; our Savior will simply take them to the peace and rest of heavenly life. And if we die bodily, that death will only be temporary. For Jesus will come again in glory, raise our bodies from the dead, and transform them to an immortal and imperishable condition very much like His own glorious body! That's the victory King Jesus has won for all of us who believe in Him, the victory of everlasting salvation!

So, this is the heart and core of our King's witness to the truth – the chief article of the good confession. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who gives His believers everlasting life. And now He calls us to follow Him in this good confession.

This confession, after all, is Jesus' gift to us. We did not make up the message of Christ ourselves; it came from the Lord. Jesus Himself has entrusted His truth to us, and He has brought us to listen to His voice. Praise God! By His work, we are “of the truth.” We have and we believe the good confession.

So, our King wants us to be good stewards of this gift. You know, just a few verses later in the 1 Timothy reading, Paul wrote, “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.” (1 Tim. 6:20) This “deposit” is the good confession, the truth of Christ. And what the Lord said to Timothy goes for us all. We Christians are all to guard the confession entrusted to us – to maintain the truth as Jesus has handed it over to us. This requires us first to learn and know the good confession well. We must be firmly grounded in the truth of Christ so that we can

detect any deviation from it. Then we must hold it fast, and carefully watch out for anything that adds to it, subtracts from it, distorts it, or otherwise alters the truth as we have received it from Jesus. That is good stewardship of the Christian confession.

Yet there's more. To be faithful stewards of the good confession our King has entrusted to us, we must also *speak* it! For the truth of Christ is not for our ears alone, but for everyone. The good confession is to be a *public* confession – one for anyone and everyone to hear. Jesus said, “Whoever confesses Me *before men*, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 10:32)

Peter is a great example for us. He openly confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. On Pentecost he confessed Him as Lord and Christ. Peter confessed Him before the Jewish rulers as the one and only Savior of the world. At Cornelius' house he confessed Jesus as Lord of all, the Judge of the living and the dead, the One in whom His believers receive the forgiveness of sins.

Like Peter, every one of us can follow Jesus in openly speaking the good confession. We can speak the Christian creeds here at church, with others in our homes, and in our daily prayers. We can speak the truth of Christ to family members and friends, classmates and coworkers, and others with whom we associate as suitable opportunities arise – and they do! And it's not that hard; if you know the Apostles' Creed, you know the good confession! And you can speak that confession of Christ in a very simple way to other folks who need to hear it. Besides that, you can bring those people here to church with you, so they can listen to the truth of Christ proclaimed and taught even more fully. This, too, is good stewardship of the good confession.

For our King's chief intention for His good confession is to serve for the salvation of sinners! As for Pontius Pilate, he may have had no interest in listening to Jesus' testimony to

the truth, but some people will listen. And for those who listen and believe, there is salvation! As the Scripture says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” (Rom. 10:9-10) And that's what King Jesus wants most of all for everyone!

So, let's continue to follow Him in the good confession, for our salvation, and the salvation of many more – all to the praise and honor of our King.

Sermon Outline:

- I. Jesus made the good confession: He is the King not of this world.
- II. Jesus calls us to follow Him in this confession.

Suggested Readings: Acts 10:34-43 1 Timothy 6:11-16 John 18:28-38

Suggested Psalm: Psalm 119:41-48

Suggested Hymns:

O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken	LSB 439/TLH 143
Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted	LSB 451/TLH 153
God Loved the World So That He Gave	LSB 571/TLH 245
Fight the Good Fight with All Thy Might	LSB 664/TLH 447
We All Believe in One True God (Clausnitzer)	LSB 953/TLH 252
We All Believe in One True God (Luther)	LSB 954/TLH 251
O Savior, Precious Savior	LSB 527/TLH 352
Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow	LSB 428
Lord Jesus, We Give Thanks to Thee	TLH 173

Lent Midweek 5: John 19:26-27

“FOLLOWING JESUS IN LOVING CARE FOR FAMILY”

(for series: “Following Jesus, Our Greatest Giver”)

“So, when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He says to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He says to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”

Here's a question for you: “What is the best gift God has given you?” I suppose just about all of you are thinking, “Well, that's easy; it's Jesus and His salvation.” Or, “It's everlasting life in Jesus Christ.” Hopefully we're all agreed on that. But let me ask another: “Following the obvious one, Jesus and His gift of everlasting life, what would you say is the *next* best gift God has given you?” I'm guessing many of you, probably most of you, are thinking about your *family*. Unless some terrible and painful thing has happened to ruin relationships in your family, or some other extraordinary circumstances have disrupted things, you likely love your family members more than anyone else besides the Lord Himself. And that's not a bad thing. The Lord teaches us to love Him most of all, and then to love our neighbor as ourselves. And our family members are, after all, our closest neighbors. So, it is good and right and natural for us to love our family.

This, of course, is exactly what our Lord Jesus was doing as He spoke to His mother and the beloved disciple from the cross. Our Lord was showing loving care for His family – most directly for His mother, yet also for His entire extended family, as well. Even in the midst of the anguish of His crucifixion, Jesus was concerned about the wellbeing of others, including His mother. When He saw Mary and the disciple whom He loved standing near the cross, Jesus says to her, “Woman, behold, your son!” Mary was to regard this disciple, whom we understand to be John Zebedee, as her own son. Then He says to the disciple, “Behold,

your mother!" So, John was to regard Mary as his own mother.

Jesus said these things because He was concerned for the proper care of His mother after His death, resurrection, and ascension. You see, as the oldest son of the family, it was His responsibility to care for her. So, Jesus designated John to take His place in this, so as to assure she would have someone reliable to protect her and provide for her bodily and spiritual needs in the years to come. Of course, He could have made provision for one of His half-brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, or Judah, to care for Mary. But at that point they did not believe in Him. (Jn. 7:5) Now, thankfully, Jesus' death and resurrection made the difference, and at some point, before Pentecost His brothers became part of the company of believers (Acts 1:14). Yet Jesus knew the beloved disciple was the best choice to take care of her in body and soul.

So that's what John did. "From that hour the disciple took her into his own home." John undoubtedly took good care of Mary, and she surely treated him with kind and grateful devotion as a loving adopted mother. Jesus made sure all would turn out for the blessing of both Mary and John.

He also made sure all would turn out for *our* blessing, as well. For as Jesus hung on the cross, He was making provision for His whole family of believers and extending to all of us His boundless loving care. For our Lord's loving care for His mother was part of what we call His active obedience for us. In other words, as Jesus kept the Fourth Commandment perfectly, honoring His mother as all of us should honor our parents, He did so as our Substitute, on our behalf. And His obedience counts for us. God gives us credit for what His Son did in loving care for Mary.

Yet in addition to that, as Jesus hung on the cross and lovingly cared for His family even in the midst of great suffering, He extended His supreme love to all of us. For Jesus

chose to remain on that cross and bear the punishment for all our sin. Even as He was our Substitute in obedience to all God's Commandments, He was our Substitute also in suffering and death. Jesus took the full penalty of sin in our place so that we do not have to endure it. Because He hung on the cross and died for us, we are fully forgiven. The guilt of our sin is entirely removed, so that God regards us as pure and clean and holy in His sight – yes, as pure and clean and holy as His own beloved Son!

For the sake of Jesus' atoning passion, God now accepts all of us who trust in Him as His own dear children. We “are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:26) And if God has forgiven us and accepted us as His children, that gives us the status of brothers and sisters of Christ. Jesus Himself said as much: “Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” (Matt. 12:50) And we know our Father's will is that we believe in His Son and receive His gift of everlasting life! (Jn. 6:40) So the reality is, from the cross our Lord Jesus Christ *made* us His true family and extended His loving care to us as His true family.

And Jesus continues His loving care for us and all His family to this day. He is constantly by our side. He provides for all our needs of body and soul. He protects us. He forgives us. He guides us in His ways by His word. Jesus calms our fears and dries our tears. He comforts and cheers us and fills us with hope. He hears our prayers and answers them for our good. Every moment of every day Jesus loves us unconditionally as His own dear family.

And we all know our Lord Jesus wants us to follow His example in loving care for our families. When I asked you before about God's best gifts, I mentioned that, after Jesus and His gift of everlasting life, many of us would name our family as the next best gift. And our family really is a *gift* from God, isn't it? You didn't choose your parents or siblings. God gave them to you, and you to them. And even though God may have used you as instruments in

the creation of your children, you didn't make them. God made them, and He entrusted them to you to take care of them for a little while. This is especially obvious in the case of adopted children. In the same way, your spouse is a gift from God. Of course, we give our willing consent when God joins us together as husband and wife, but He is the One who provided that husband or wife for us, and united us as one.

Because God has given us our family, He expects us to take good care of them. That's why He gave the Fourth Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," which not only includes obedience, service, and respect while children are young and living at home, but also loving respect and service to parents when they are older and in need of help, just as our Lord did for His mother. We heard that in our reading from 1 Timothy 5, that we are to repay our parents and grandparents for what they did for us, by caring for them in their senior years, and that we are to provide for those in our own household. All this is practicing good stewardship of the families God has entrusted to us.

The Ruth narrative gives us some good examples. Ruth cared for Naomi, her widowed mother-in-law, and was loving and loyal to her by remaining with her when she returned to her home. Naomi for her part cared for Ruth, who was also a widow, and helped her get a good husband. Boaz married Ruth and took good care of her. They all showed what it looks like to provide loving care to family.

So when we provide for the bodily needs of our family members; when we are loyal to them and protect them; when we give them proper honor and respect, actually listen to them, and speak to them kindly; when we are concerned for their emotional wellbeing; when we teach and lovingly discipline children; when we guide and encourage them in the Lord, pray with them and for them, and attend the services of the Lord's house together; when we work and play with them, and spend time together – when we care for our families like this, we are

following our Lord Jesus.

Now, if we love our families the way we think we do, it shouldn't be that hard to care for them the way our Lord wants us to. Yet we often have trouble with this, don't we? Sometimes we're rude or short-tempered or even negligent. And we know the reason why – because of our inborn sinfulness, which is always selfish. Yet in the Lord Jesus, we can do what He calls us to do. So, brothers and sisters, let no selfishness or personal ambition keep you from this. Let no grudge from past hurts or offenses, no laziness, no misplaced priorities of worldliness or materialism prevent you from serving your family in keeping with God's word. Rather, learn from Jesus, and, by the power of His forgiving grace, follow His example of loving care for your family.

Sermon Outline:

- I. Jesus showed loving care for His mother.
- II. Jesus made us His family and gives us His loving care.
- III. Jesus calls us to follow His example in loving care for our families.

Suggested Readings: Ruth 4:13-17 1 Timothy 5:3-8,16 John 19:25-27

Suggested Psalm: Psalm 103

Suggested Hymns:

Jesus, Loving to the End	LSB 447 (v7-9)/TLH 182
Jesus, Refuge of the Weary	LSB 423/TLH 145
O Perfect Life of Love	LSB 452/TLH 170
On My Heart Imprint Thine Image	LSB 422/TLH 179
Praise to Thee and Adoration	LSB 692/TLH 401
O God of Mercy, God of Might	LSB 852/TLH 439
Savior, Thy Dying Love	TLH 403

Lent Midweek 6: John 19:30

“FOLLOWING JESUS IN SELF-SACRIFICE”

(for series: “Following Jesus, Our Greatest Giver”)

“When Jesus had received the wine vinegar, He said, 'It is finished,' and He bowed His head and handed over His spirit.”

When our Lord Jesus was hanging on the cross, fully conscious of the work He was accomplishing and the Scriptures He was fulfilling, He said, “I thirst,” knowing this would initiate the fulfillment of one last prophecy before He died. So, in response to Jesus' words, the soldiers filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a hyssop stick, and held it up to His mouth. And when Jesus had received the wine vinegar in fulfillment of Psalm 69:21 “for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink” He said, “It is finished.” And He bowed His head and handed over His spirit.

Our Lord Jesus died in a manner He alone could. He actively handed over His human spirit to His heavenly Father, choosing to lay down His life when He knew the time was exactly right. No one but the Son of God could do that – simply give His spirit to God and die as an act of His own will. But Jesus did this, because He was deliberately giving Himself as the sacrifice that completed the payment for our sin. Just as He had said before, no one took His life from Him; He lay it down of His own accord. (Jn. 10:18) So this truly was a self-sacrifice; Jesus voluntarily gave all He could. Yes, this was the *supreme* sacrifice – the willing self-giving of the Son of God into death for the salvation of the world.

Now, as Jesus completed this sacrifice, He said, “It is finished,” or “It is completed.” Not just the drinking of the wine vinegar, but every other prophecy concerning the work of the Christ up to His death was at that point completed. Both the types, that is, the people and objects and events that foreshadowed the Savior, and the words that spoke of Him directly all

these prophecies were fulfilled. Jesus' crucifixion marked the completion of them all.

In dying, Jesus also completed God's Law for us. We know God's abiding commandments; they are summarized like this: "Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mt. 22:37-39) But we also know we sinners don't do this; we *cannot* do this as God requires. We know we have not come anywhere close to fulfilling God's holy commandments, and we deserve His punishment because of it. Yet we thank and praise God that Jesus has completed the Law on our behalf. As true Man, Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin." (Heb. 4:15) He resisted all temptation perfectly in our place. And Jesus kept all the commandment in our place, coming "in the likeness of sinful man... in order that the righteous requirements of the Law might be fully met in us." (Rom. 8:3-4) We are now made righteous by the one Man's obedience – a perfect obedience that took Him all the way to the cross in keeping with His Father's will. So, as Jesus hung on that cross and proclaimed, "It is finished," He declared to us that God's Law is also completed for us.

So too, with the death of Jesus, His work of atonement is fully completed. We know that because of our sinfulness, we were separated from God. We had cut ourselves off from Him and written our own eternal death warrants. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to offer Himself as the sacrifice of atonement, to reconcile the world to God. When He handed over His spirit to His heavenly Father, Jesus knew exactly what He was doing – giving His life as a ransom in the place of the many. And with this sacrificial payment, God's righteous wrath was appeased, and our sins were fully forgiven. So, in declaring, "It is finished," Jesus announced the completion of the atonement.

The sin of the world is paid for. God's Law has been kept perfectly on our behalf. The

prophecies have all been fulfilled. Jesus Christ has finished it all! And that, dear Christians, should fill us with complete confidence in our salvation! Since Jesus has finished all these things in His self-sacrifice, we can be fully certain our sins are forgiven, and we have everlasting life!

And that is why we can and should follow Jesus in self-sacrifice. We know that because of His finished work, our salvation is secure. We don't have to worry about doing anything to earn our salvation or make ourselves acceptable to God. Therefore, we are free to give our attention mainly to the needs of others, and sacrifice ourselves for them in love, even as our Savior has sacrificed Himself for us.

We follow Him in offering ourselves as *living sacrifices*. Obviously, we cannot sacrifice ourselves just the same way as Jesus did, in atonement for the sin of the world. Our lives could never be a sufficient ransom, and more importantly, Jesus has already finished this. It doesn't need to be done again! But we actually can follow Jesus in offering our lives as “living sacrifices.”

That's the language God has given us in Romans chapter twelve. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Rom. 12:1) We hear the same teaching in 1 Peter chapter two. “As you come to Him, a Living Stone, rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 2:4-5) It's the very thing Malachi foretold of the Lord, that He would come and purify His priestly people, that they may offer to Him an offering in righteousness. (Mal. 3:3)

So, what does this mean? In view of God's mercies, Paul said – that is, because

Jesus sacrificed Himself to make us pure, giving His entire self into death – we are to sacrifice ourselves entirely to God, offering Him our whole lives. For our Savior did not give Himself for us *in part*. So, we do not give back to Him in part. We don't offer ourselves to God just on Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings, for example. Rather, we give Him our whole selves, *all* the time. We understand that offering ourselves to God as living sacrifices involves the giving of our *time*. It requires us to be faithful stewards of the time He has given us. Yes, it means we devote to our Savior *all* our time. Otherwise we are not sacrificing our whole lives.

You see, God both teaches us, and has graciously qualified us, to present ourselves to Him as living sacrifices – to live as His holy priests, who offer Him acceptable sacrifices through Jesus Christ, all day, every day, in our various callings. In the passages from Romans and 1 Peter we hear several examples of Christian self-sacrifice: serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy, living peaceably with others, submitting to governing authorities and those over us in the workplace, wives submitting to husbands, husbands honoring wives, showing compassion, suffering patiently in doing good. In all these things, and in all our other everyday activities, we sacrifice ourselves by using our time, not just for our own benefit, but also and especially for the wellbeing of others. Work time, school time, exercise time, study time, mealtime, chore time, recreation and relaxation time, even sleep time – it's all God's gift to us to use for purposes that please and honor Him.

This challenges us to think about the way we spend our time, doesn't it? Whatever it is I'm doing, am I doing it “for the Lord”? (Col. 3:23) Am I presenting God a living sacrifice? Am I conducting myself as a holy priest, whose sacrifice is acceptable to God?

Because our Lord sacrificed Himself wholly for us, we offer ourselves wholly to Him as living sacrifices. This is following Jesus in self-sacrifice. By His saving mercy, yes, our sacrifice *is* acceptable to God. For the sake of Jesus' finished work, God is pleased with us.

Sermon Outline:

- I. Jesus gave Himself as the sacrifice that completed the payment for our sin.
- II. We follow Him in offering ourselves as living sacrifices.

Suggested Readings: Malachi 3:1-4 Romans 12:1-8 John 19:28-30

Suggested Psalm: 4 or 50 or 69:1-4, 19-21, 29-32

Suggested Hymns:

Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed	LSB 437/TLH 154
Not All the Blood of Beasts	LSB 431/TLH156
Lamb of God, Pure and Holy	LSB 434/TLH 146
Christ, the Life of All the Living	LSB 420/TLH 151
O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken	LSB 439/TLH 143
Upon the Cross Extended	LSB 453/TLH 171
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross	LSB 425/TLH 175
A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth	LSB 438*/TLH 142

*LSB Omits key verses; See especially TLH 142 v.4