

“FOLLOW ME!”

John 21:20-25

David Dalton, a busy mother who lived in Costa Mesa, California tells the following story:

It was a busy day in our Costa Mesa, California, home. But then, with 10 children and one on the way, every day was a bit hectic. On this particular day, however, I was having trouble doing even routine chores — all because of one little boy.

Len, who was three at the time, was on my heels no matter where I went. Whenever I stopped to do something and turned back around, I would trip over him. Several times, I patiently suggested fun activities to keep him occupied. "Wouldn't you like to play on the swing set?" I asked again.

But he simply smiled an innocent smile and said, "Oh, that's all right, Mommy. I'd rather be in here with you." Then he continued to bounce happily along behind me.

After stepping on his toes for the fifth time, I began to lose my patience and insisted that he go outside and play with the other children. When I asked him why he was acting this way, he looked up at me with sweet green eyes and said, "Well, Mommy, in Sunday School my teacher told me to walk in Jesus' footsteps. But I can't see Him, so I'm walking in yours."

I gathered Len in my arms and held him close. Tears of love and humility spilled over from the prayer that grew in my heart — a prayer of thanks for the simple, yet beautiful perspective of a three-year-old boy.¹

I don't know about you, but that story makes me stop and think, "Who would want to walk in my footsteps because they are looking for Jesus, whom they cannot see, but they can see me?" As we finish our study of the Gospel of John today, we will see that Peter and John may have had similar questions. Let us turn to the last chapter of the

¹Taken from http://www.funnysermons.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3666&pop=1&page=0&ac=1

Gospel of John.

John 21:20-25 NAS:

²⁰ Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"

²¹ So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?"

²² Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"

²³ Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

²⁴ This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself

would not contain the books that would be written.

The question in verse 21 is so typical of Peter. Now that Jesus has told him what he is to do, he wants to know what John is going to do. Jesus tells Peter that he is going to die for Jesus and not to worry about what Jesus has in store for John, and that what John is going to do is not really his concern. John's form of service will be different from Peter's. Even if John should live until Jesus returned, that would not in any way affect what Peter was to do for Jesus, and that was simply to follow Him.

Isn't this also typical of many of us? Now admit it. How many times have you listened to a sermon or a radio program and thought, "Oh, I wish so-and-so were hearing this! She needs it so much." It is not because you think the person would be encouraged, rather it is something you think they ought to be practicing and they are not. Or, if that person is sitting with you in church, you think, maybe even pray, "Open your ears—apply this to your life." But what does Christ say in verse 22? "*Take heed to yourself. Do not worry about him. You just follow Me.*" After all, the only person you can really do anything about is you. So each of us is to be sure we are doing

what God calls us to do, that we are fulfilling our role in the kingdom, and that we are applying the sermons to ourselves and not to our neighbor.

Paul, when speaking of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, points out that not everyone has the same gift. So therefore God has given each of us different roles and different ministries. We are all called to be obedient and to live holy lives, as Peter exhorts in 1 Peter 1:15-16 ESV:

¹⁵ But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Nevertheless, even though we are all to live obedient and pure lives, we all have different ministries.

Jesus did not reveal what would happen to John in his later life. He simply said that if it were His will for John not to die, that did not affect Peter's service or Peter's obligation to follow Jesus. That is important for us to understand. We too are not to be overly concerned with or judge the calling of others. Rather we should concentrate on the calling God has given us. In

that way we can build and strengthen the body of Christ.

Now what is the point for the comparison here of youth and old age?

Jesus speaks of Peter's youth when he could pretty well do as he pleased.

Then in his old age things would happen over which he had no control.

If you are young now, or if you can remember when you were young, you probably know that in your youth you often have optimistic plans that you are trying to take steps to eventually achieve. Youth believes the sky is the limit and they plan to reach it. They often feel that the older generation is over the hill and now it is youth's time to take over.

As the older generation looks on they cannot help but wonder how long it will be before the realities of life catch up with these young people, just as they did with them. Oh, yes, some will attain those lofty goals and some will become quite wealthy and successful, but those things will not make them happy nor bring them peace. The older folks know so well that the face of reality will eventually show up as well as the accompanying disappointments. But for a few moments of time, this self-reliant confidence is one of the gifts of youth.

However, youth also carries with it a lack of experience, which is closely associated with foolishness. Passions can also be undisciplined and even uncontrollable. However, even with such shortcomings, there is an energy and optimism that are quite satisfying. So we believe that the Church should not overlook or minimize these gifts that God gives to the young.

Youth, however, needs to recall the words of wise King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:1:

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them.

Now let us shift over to the, shall we say, more seasoned veterans of the battle, the older folks. One unpleasant condition of old age is that certain things are going to be done to us that we may not appreciate. In the situation that we have just looked at concerning Peter, it is his martyrdom by crucifixion. This is not something one looks forward to experiencing.

Neither does one really look forward to the illnesses, limited mobility, aches

and pains, tiredness, and other problems that frequently accompany aging. Yet Peter would experience some of these things, and we will as well and, believe it or not, these things are as important and valuable to the Church as the vitality of youth. Because, in spite of the decreased physical strength, older people have gained another important strength.

Job 12:12 NAS:

Wisdom is with aged men, With long life is understanding.

If we consider the scriptures about these two age groups together, we see that they need to respect each other and work together: the energy and enthusiasm of youth coupled with the wisdom and experience of age.

Now, coming back to Peter's life, if you will look back to verse 19 there is something that we really need to zero in on. "*Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death **he would glorify God.***" Peter would glorify God by a martyr's death on the cross, just as Jesus had died. Now what we do throughout our lives is certainly important in honoring our Lord, but is it not true that we bring honor to God and Christ even more by how we handle suffering? I know suffering is not pleasant and we usually do not welcome it

although we are told to in 1 Peter 4:13 NLT.²

Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

Listen to Jesus' words in:

Acts 9:15-16 NLT:

¹⁵ But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul (Paul)³ is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.

¹⁶ And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

It was in such suffering that Paul glorified God. So it does not matter if you are 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, or older. Each age contains its purpose in God's plan and therefore also in the functioning of the Church. We need the

² See also Colossians 1:24; Philippians 1:29, 3:10,; Hebrews 10:32; 1 Peter 5:9; Revelation 2:10; 1 Peter 2:20, 21; 2 Timothy 1:8; Romans 8:17.

experiences and gifts of all people in the Church.

We also see in this passage a very noticeable difference between the personalities and temperaments of Peter and John. Whenever Peter makes an appearance, he usually leaps into action, often the wrong kind of action. We might say Peter was impulsive. Today, a psychologist might label him with ADHD. When Jesus asked, "*Whom do you say that I am?*" it was Peter who answered: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). When Jesus was being arrested, it was Peter who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest (John 18:10). Here in John 21, after recognizing the voice of Jesus when He called from the shore, Peter immediately jumped into the water and made his way to Jesus. Peter was definitely a man of action.

John, on the other hand, is a quiet man. He is not into cutting off ears. When Jesus appeared on the shore and Peter jumped from the boat into the water, John remained on board and brought in the fish that Jesus had provided. We could probably label John as an intellectual. **But they both served Jesus in an equally valuable way.** Jesus emphasizes this by telling Peter saying, "*If I*

³ Parentheses mine.

want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

Jesus is making, we believe, a very subtle point here. All Christians are different and that is just the way Jesus meant it to be. God gives us each a spiritual gift and a special personality, and He want us to use both in His service as we follow Him. In other words, He calls each of us individually to be ourselves and not be overly concerned about what someone else's individual calling might be and how they are fulfilling it. Then it is Jesus' purpose to combine each individual calling in order to accomplish His overall grand plan for the world as well as the Kingdom of God. This building process is likened to the construction of a building in 1 Peter 2:4-6

NAS:

⁴ *You are coming to Christ, who is the living **cornerstone** of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.*

⁵ *And **you are living stones** that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.*

*⁶As the Scriptures say, “I am placing a **cornerstone** in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.”*

Each person who has come to faith in Christ since His death and resurrection is considered a **living stone**. Each one of those stones is used by Christ to build His Church universal. You might better understand it if we changed the word “stone” to “brick.” Each brick placed on top of and next to another is being used by Christ to build a Holy Temple that will accomplish His will for this world and the One to come. You are therefore an essential brick in that structure. Without you, that Temple would be incomplete. Each brick has equal value in the eyes of Jesus who serves as the **cornerstone** of the Temple.

A cornerstone is most often the large stone placed in the foundation at the principal corner of a building, forming a part of a corner or angle in a wall.⁴ It is the essential building block of the structure from which construction must begin. You might understand this concept better if you considered it to

⁴ Merriam-Webster, Inc: Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. 10th ed. Springfield, Mass., U.S.A. : Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993

be the foundation of the building.

The foundation is the first, and an essential, part of the building that must be present before the rest of the structure can be built.

Now Peter, for example, as well as Andrew his brother, were called by Jesus to be "*fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). Peter's calling was to bring people into the kingdom. He was called by Jesus to be an evangelist. It is true that all Christ's disciples are called to evangelism but it is not the primary spiritual gift for all of them. We also, like all Christians everywhere, are called to evangelize (tell people about Jesus and His message of salvation), but it may not be our primary spiritual gift. Peter led three thousand people to faith in Christ at Pentecost, and later five thousand believed as a result of his preaching. Today, we see an exceptional gift of evangelism in the person of **Billy Graham**, who has been used much as God used Peter.

We might also consider Paul to be an evangelist, but that was not his primary spiritual gift either. Paul was called to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, that is, to all the rest of the people in the world who were not Jews. He was called to build the Church. Paul's spiritual gift could have been administration or leadership, or perhaps both.

Then we have the apostle John, characterizing him as a "*mender-of-nets*," from that setting in which John is first seen and called by Jesus (Matthew 4:21). He means that *John's specific calling was to rebuild what had been destroyed*. This ministry was required long after Peter and Paul had died and the Church was scattered and suffering intense persecution.

So have you discovered what your spiritual gift is? Do you know what role you are to play in the building of the Church?

Romans 12:6-8 NLT:

⁶ *In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you.*

⁷ *If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well.*

⁸ *If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.*

Notice that some of the gifts are behind-the-scenes and others are “up front.”

Nevertheless, they are all important. The person who gives or who administers or who helps is just as important as the pastor and the teacher.

Each of us is to be obedient and faithful to do whatever God calls us and gifts us for.

Let us consider some very pertinent comments by James Montgomery Boice.

“There are advantages certainly in youth and in old age, those who are activists and those who are thinkers, the evangelists, restorers, and builders. But to be honest, we must also point out that each has its problems too. Those who are young tend to be foolish in their headstrong self-reliance. The old tend to become concerned with their own affairs and therefore selfish. The weakness of the activist is insensitivity to others who move at slower paces. The thinker can become lazy. The evangelist can become shallow. The builder or

restorer can become critical of those whom he regards as inferior. The advantages of each age, temperament, or calling can easily be marred by sin.

“But there is a solution. It is the solution Jesus told Peter (and presumably John as well): *‘Follow me.’* Why is this a solution? First, because if we are following Jesus, then our eyes will be on Jesus and he—not our own particular and imperfect form of it—will be seen as the standard of Christian service. If you have your eyes on yourself, you expect people to measure up to you and judge them to be inferior if they do not. With your eyes on Jesus, He becomes the standard for both you and them and he actually draws you together rather than allowing you to be driven apart. I was walking along the street once, following another person. I turned aside much as Peter did when, looking away from Jesus, he saw what John was doing and I bumped into a telephone pole. **We will bump into one pole or another if we take our eyes off Jesus.**

“Second, if we have our eyes on Jesus, we will see not only something about him but something about ourselves as well. What we will see about ourselves is that we are at best ‘*unprofitable servants*.’ There will be no room for boasting, no room for arrogant self-sufficiency. We are inadequate and unprofitable. What we need is Christ ... in His own person, first of all, and also in one another.⁵

Remember Jesus’ words to Peter, which also apply to all of us: **Follow Me!**

If we do not, we will regret it for eternity.

John 21:24-25 NAS:

²⁴ *This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.*

²⁵ *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were* written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would* not*

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *An Expository Commentary – John, Volume 5: Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1648-1652.

contain the books that would be written.*

John is testifying that he himself was witness to all these things he has written about and that his report is truthful. He goes on to add that Jesus did so many things during His earthly ministry that it would be virtually impossible to write them all down. The gospel writers, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gave us a sampling so that we would have what we need to instruct us, guide us, and encourage us.

In conclusion, if we were to sum up the book of John in just a few words, we believe we could look to chapter 20, verses 30 and 31:

³⁰ *The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book.*

³¹ *But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that **by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.***

What more can be said? AMEN! AND AMEN!

