

Friends,

In Matthew 4:19 Jesus says, “Come, follow me.”

These are profound words on the part of Jesus because they are words that reveal where our true allegiance lies: with Jesus, or someone or something else.

There is little doubt that we currently live in a unique and difficult time. It seems every day brings a new level challenge to what it means to faithfully follow Jesus.

Last week, as we all know, our nation experienced something it had never experienced when there was an attack on the capitol in Washington D.C. This event has, unsurprisingly, shaken people to the core. Strong feelings on all sides of the issue exists. Most notably for us as Christians and as the church we are left with questions such as, “What do we do?” and “What is our faithful response?” The answer is what Jesus shares with us in Matthew 4:19 where Jesus invites us, “Come, follow me.”

I realize there is some debate on what all it means to follow Jesus considering these recent events. However, there is also much we can be sure:

1. We can be sure that Jesus alone is Lord and Savior. Our allegiance is first and foremost to Christ. This means allegiance to Christ over country and even Christ over family when the need calls for it, because the Kingdom of Jesus is NOT of this world.
2. We can be sure that the church alone is the bride of Christ. When we as the church choose to marry a political party or ideology, we lose Christ as our groom. We sell ourselves out. Our response must not be a Republican or Democratic one, our response must be a Christian one. In this church we will not tell you which political party to vote for who to align yourselves with. But we are going to heed the words of Christ Himself who says, “Come, follow me” and hold ourselves accountable to His command and allegiance. In this church, we have both Democrats and Republicans. This is as it should be because we have a greater allegiance that binds us together than our political preferences and that is to Christ who beckons us to come and follow Him. This is a church where we set a counter-cultural witness to love our Republican brothers and sisters and our Democratic brothers and sisters because this is what it means to follow Christ. When the church chooses to follow the ways of the world over Christ, it loses its prophetic voice and bride-ship with Christ. In Christ, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, Republican or Democrat. We are one family here. And we recognize that the extremist views of both parties are not representative of the parties.

We will not be married to a political party because we will not be unfaithful to our Groom who is Christ.

3. We can be sure that what happened last Wednesday at the Capitol was wrong. What happened was not okay, and we denounce it in the strongest terms possible. Just as we denounce all forms of white supremacy, along with systemic racism, injustice in any form, and violence in all forms whenever and wherever they may occur. These elements are never the way of Christ. As human beings we are flawed. We are broken. We are sinful. As followers of Christ our call is to repentance, for ourselves and on behalf of others.
4. We can be sure that our response must be filled with grace *and* truth. To go the way of Christ means we go wherever we find the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It means we live lives as innocent as doves and shrewd as snakes. It means we have the compassion of the One to whom little children loved to come and the fierceness to stand against the fallen power brokers of the day. It means we have the courage to speak truth in the face of lies and stand up for justice in the face of injustice. It means we stand strong without attack. It means we demonstrate conviction through mercy. It means we live with resolve in the face of struggle. It means we rise even as we bend down on our knees.

I love how Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it in *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Let us reject cheap grace and embrace the cost of discipleship because we can be sure that our trust is best placed in Christ alone.

When all is said and done, Christ alone will reign. When all is said and done, Christ will live for eternity with His bride, the church. And we get to be a part of that church.

As a mentor of mine has shared, “When the demons in hell escape, we fear not. For our trust is in the Lord, and we place ourselves in the strong hands of the One who loves us and is so much more powerful than we are. So, walk in the ways God opens, no matter how limited the horizon.”

So, let not your hearts be troubled. We serve the One who has come, who is here, and who is yet to come. We will continue to be a people who pray and offer a counter cultural witness in this time.

One way we will do this is we will join on Wednesday, January 20 at 6:00 PM for a time of prayer online. January 20 is Inauguration Day in our country. Pastor Janet and I will lead this time to pray for our allegiance to be to Christ first, to repent, to be a people of grace and truth, and to put our complete trust in the Lord. We will make sure there is a link put out to the First Church Williamsport YouTube channel so that you can join us. I hope you will join us for this time of prayer.

Church, let us come, let not your hearts be troubled, may we continue to follow Him. *Amen.*

In Christ,
Pastor Matt