



Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 4

THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

SERIES EXPLANATION

“We need better leadership!” Have you ever said that? Perhaps you were frustrated with the direction being taken by some elected official or by management at your workplace or by the coach of your favorite team. You were frustrated because you know that no matter how many resources an organization has, it will flounder if leaders do not lead well: providing direction, training, motivation, coordination, encouragement, and even grace. Leadership is extremely important. And so, there are times we lament, “We need better leadership!”

Jesus Christ is the leader of our congregation, our home, our lives. And his leadership is perfect in every way. Therefore, when things are amiss in any of those arenas, what is needed is not better leadership, but better followership. In this series, we ask Christ to empower us with his Spirit so that we might better follow his lead. May we better reflect the beauty of his life, better make his priorities our own, and better serve our God and neighbor. Our worship follows this path.

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| Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost | <i>Followers of Christ Obey His Law from the Heart</i> |
| Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost | <i>Followers of Christ See the True Purpose of His Power</i> |
| Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost | <i>Followers of Christ Are Armed for Battle</i> |
| Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost | <i>Followers of Christ Are Humble Servants</i> |
| Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost* | <i>Followers of Christ Have Powerful Allies</i> |
| Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost | <i>Followers of Christ Know How to Love Their Families</i> |
| Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost | <i>Followers of Christ Maintain Proper Priorities</i> |
| Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost | <i>Followers of Christ Make Selfless Sacrifices</i> |

* St. Michael & All Angels

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 1, 2024 (Proper 17B)



THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

OBEY HIS LAW FROM THE HEART

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

A loving father gives his son and daughter a list of rules and regulations. Chores, curfews, civilities, dress code—the father makes his will clearly known. The son strives to follow the rules for two reasons. 1) He wants to get his allowance. 2) He is afraid that if he breaks the rules, his father will punish him. The daughter strives to follow the rules, also for two reasons. 1) She believes her father established those rules not to control her but for her safety and blessing. 2) She wants to demonstrate how much she loves and trusts her father. Those two children’s actions might look almost identical. Their hearts are very different!

Likewise, following Christ is not simply a matter of outward observance of laws. It is a matter of the heart. The Law was given so we could see God’s heart and demonstrate how his heart has affected our own. The followership Christ seeks flows from hearts that have been radically transformed by God’s law and gospel. Christ wants his followers to be less like the son described above, and more like the daughter. This week we see that followers of Christ obey his law from the heart.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9 – God is serious about his law because he knows that when his children follow the law carefully, the result is blessing and honor.

Romans 9:30–10:4 – Followers of Christ obey the law, not to attempt to become righteous, but to show heartfelt love to the God who declares us righteous through faith in Jesus.

*Mark 7:1-8,14,15,21-23 – The Pharisees established traditions which they thought safeguarded obedience to God, but they missed God’s desire for heartfelt love.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel serves as the sermon text because it directly references the heart, both as to what God wants (“heart” as a metonymy for “love”) and as the true source of uncleanness. Note the parallel to the topic of Proper 4 where Jesus taught, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” There the primary emphasis was on the law given for the mankind’s blessing, not as some sort of divine power-play or attempt to control us. This week, the emphasis is more on the fact that as we realize God’s goodness—goodness evident in the blessings provided by his law and especially demonstrated by the gift of his Son—our hearts are transformed. In turn, we view the law entirely differently.

(continued)

HYMN

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|-------------|---|
| Opening | 697 May We Your Precepts, Lord, Fulfill |
| HOD | 740 O God, My Faithful God |
| Third/Distr | 626 My Heart Is Filled with Thankfulness |
| Closing | 705 Oh, That the Lord Would Guide My Ways |



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 8, 2024 (Proper 18B)

THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST SEE THE TRUE PURPOSE OF HIS POWER

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Power is neither inherently good nor bad. Fire is powerful. The chef uses fire to create meals. But the arsonist uses fire to destroy homes. Nuclear fission is a powerful force. The engineer harnesses it, producing abundant electricity. The tyrant harnesses it, threatening others with nuclear weapons. What matters is the purpose of the one who has that power.

Jesus has limitless power, as the numerous accounts of his miracles demonstrate. Those who witnessed those miracles understood that Jesus used his power for good. That *doesn't* mean they all understood Jesus' true purpose. Some thought Jesus' purpose was to make this temporal life better. And while Jesus did that at times, his ultimate purpose was to save us from sin and give us the gift of eternal life. Followers of Christ see the true purpose of his power.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 35:4-7a – Through the prophet Isaiah God promised that he would come, making the blind see and the lame leap. But the ultimate purpose of his coming was to save us.

Acts 3:1-10 – Christ gave his follower Peter the power to heal a man who was lame from birth. When healed, the man does not go first to family and friends but to the temple to praise God.

*Mark 7:31-37 – Jesus uses his power not to elicit praise from the crowd but to demonstrate his love for a man who was deaf and mute.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel serves as the sermon text. It addresses a common question. *“If Jesus has all this power, why does he allow _____?”* The devil would have us think that the purpose of Jesus' power is to make our lives better right now. So, Jesus pulls the man aside not only to show this man how much he was loved as an individual but also so that there were not more witnesses. Jesus instructs those who saw what he did not to tell others. He knows the people would be perfectly content to have Jesus remain among them as a healer of physical ills, a provider of material blessings, one who could solve today's problems. Yet Jesus had come to do so much more. Would they also want that?

Ultimately, all these readings have this truth underneath. Christ's demonstrations of power prove that he's the almighty Son of God. That means that when he laid his power aside and submitted to the cross, his sacrifice was valuable enough to redeem the world. The love proven in his saving work enables us to trust that however Jesus uses his power now—to heal or not to heal, to provide or not to provide—is good and right. “He [does] everything well.”

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HYMNS

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| Opening | 765 O Son of God, in Galilee |
| HOD | 769 Your Hand, O Lord, in Days of Old |
| Third/Distr | 537 Word of God, Come Down on Earth |
| Closing | 520 Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing |

SERVICE OPTIONS

While this week contains multiple new hymns, they are set to familiar tunes.

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost September 15, 2024 (Proper 19B)



THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE ARMED FOR THE BATTLE

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

What is the worst war in human history? One might point to World War II, which has the highest death toll of at least 90 million people. Or consider the Three Kingdoms War, which not only resulted in over 40 million deaths but also lasted for most of the third century. There is no end to the sad list of nominations: the Thirty Years War, the Taiping Rebellion, the American Civil War, World War I.

None of those is the correct answer. The worst war in human history began when the first shot was fired in Eden. It has been raging since. It is a war against “spiritual forces of evil” (Ephesians 6:12). This is not a war over land or resources. It is a war for souls. The reality is that there are demonic forces that want to do more than kill you; they want to claim you for all eternity. The good news: Christ has already called you his own and equipped you for this war. Followers of Christ are armed for the battle.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

1 Kings 18:21-39 – In a showdown between Elijah and the prophets of the idol Baal, the LORD makes it clear that all the combined forces of hell are nothing compared to the almighty power of God.

*Ephesians 6:10-18 – So that they might be ready for the battle, followers of Christ put on the full armor of God.

Mark 9:14-27 – As we fight spiritual battles, Jesus assures us that “Everything is possible for the one who believes,” that is, the one who relies on Christ, who has already won the war.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The second reading serves as the basis for the sermon. It provides great opportunity for the preacher to explain how we prepare ourselves for spiritual war. It includes being rooted in the Word, which is truth and which creates the faith through which we receive the righteousness of Christ. It includes “[praying] in the Spirit on all occasions...”

There are timely applications. As the preacher prepares this sermon, many of his people will have the upcoming elections on their mind. Many see recent elections as part of a larger culture war. How many of our people see the cultural war as being almost identical to the spiritual war? If so, they might see electing the right individuals or passing the right laws as an integral part of spiritual warfare. Yet, Paul mentions nothing about such tactics! Not laws and rules, but Word and prayer. This, of course, does not mean Christians are disinterested in government and elections. But our theme says that “Christ’s followers are armed for battle.” Christians need to understand what their resources are in the spiritual war... and what are *not* resources. The Gospel Reading illustrates what happens when Jesus’ followers attempt to fight evil spiritual forces relying on something *other* than Christ—failure (Mark 9:18).

HYMNS

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| Opening | 870 O Church, Arise |
| HOD | 517 Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness |
| Third/Distr | 872 Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus |
| Closing | 869 Onward, Christian Soldiers - v1,4 |

SERVICE OPTIONS

If 870 is new to your congregation, consider having a cantor or choir sing the first two verses. A Google search will turn up multiple SATB arrangements.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 22, 2024 (Proper 20B)



THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE HUMBLE SERVANTS

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Humility and pride are polar opposites. Pride exalts self at the expense of God and others. Humility exalts God and others at the expense of self. Pride is the essential vice, for it increases one's hunger for all other sins. Humility increases one's hunger for the forgiveness and healing found in Christ. The one who is proud demands to be served. The one who is humble is not content unless serving others. St. Augustine described it this way: "It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels."

As we see all Christ did to serve us, our hearts melt. Within us grows a Christ-like obsession to serve others, without counting the cost, without any desire to be repaid. Those who are in positions of Christian leadership understand that their leadership can only be achieved through service. For followers of Christ are humble servants.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Numbers 12:1-15 – The pride of Aaron, the high priest, and Miriam, a prophetess, led them to bad-mouth humble Moses and belittle Moses' wife, simply for being of another race.

James 3:13-18 – St. James teaches that ambitiously pursuing greatness is not just prideful but also demonic. True greatness in Jesus' kingdom is acting toward others in ways that are humble.

* Mark 9:30-37 – The greatest in Jesus' kingdom is the one humble enough to gladly serve a little child who could not possibly repay that favor.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel reading serves as the sermon text. It provides the opportunity to address the truth that pride is the root of all other sin. Consider that Jesus is trying to explain for a second time his suffering, death, and resurrection. The disciples still do not understand, but they also don't ask for clarification because they "were afraid to ask him." They are too proud to admit they need Jesus to explain. Despite this, they are arguing about who is the greatest. (*The Commentary on the Propers: Year B*) notes that "the three" had recently come down from the mount of Transfiguration, which could have kickstarted the conversation.) When Jesus inquires what they are talking about, again they do not speak up. They know that their conversation about greatness is improper, but pride keeps them from admitting it to Jesus. Pride prevented them from seeking greater depth within the gospel, from confessing their sin. Pride is the mother of all vices. (The First Reading could be brought in as pride leading to a sense of superiority over others, and for something as superficial as race.) The disciples missed that Jesus was talking about having to die—for all people! Christianity addresses pride by showing us how we are all equally in need of saving. When we realize we have a Savior who was willing to humble himself to the point of death, it makes us willing to "be the very last," to put ourselves out in humble service of others even if there is no possibility of them ever repaying our service, just like a little child cannot repay.

HYMNS

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| Opening | 737 Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way |
| HOD | 767 Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us |
| Third/Distr | 704 Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus |
| Closing | 735 Before You I Kneel |



Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 29, 2024

THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST HAVE POWERFUL ALLIES

(THE FESTIVAL OF ST. MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS)

Foreword

In The Foundation we typically follow the Propers, allowing the local pastor to choose if he'd rather observe a minor festival. However, if a minor festival falls a Sunday, particularly if it fits well with the flow of a series (not always the case since minor festivals typically have readings that do not connect with the weeks before or after), we incorporate it. Just two weeks ago the readings stressed that we are in the middle of a spiritual war. This week, we celebrate that in that war, there are elite special forces on our side.

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Green Berets. Rangers. SEALs. Delta Force. These special forces groups are part of the United States military. They are elite: highly trained with unique skill sets. Many of their important missions are carried out in total secrecy.

Two weeks ago, we acknowledged that we are in the middle of a massive spiritual war. Today, we thank God that we fight this war with the protection of special forces. Since the fifth century, Christians have observed the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels. We commemorate that God has sent Michael, one of the great archangels described in Scripture, and countless of his fellow angels to protect and serve mankind. Let us rejoice that followers of Christ have powerful allies!

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*2 Kings 6:8-17 – As Elisha fulfilled his mission to proclaim the word and will of God, the angels fulfilled their mission by providing Elisha with protection.

Revelation 12:7-12 – When war broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels defeated Satan and his demons.

Luke 10:17-20 – We rejoice that Christ enables us to overcome the work of demons. We rejoice even more that our names are written in heaven.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The Old Testament reading serves as the sermon text, providing the preacher a wonderful opportunity to vividly share this remarkable narrative. It provides a good illustration of the roles played in the great spiritual war. Man shares the Word of God. Angels have done that in the past, Gabriel, for example. But now, that responsibility falls to us. Luther said, "When God wants to speak and deal with us, he does not avail himself of an angel, but of parents, or the pastor, or our neighbor." The angels protect us, certainly at all times, but especially when the demons would want to silence our proclamation of the gospel.

HYMNS

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| Opening | 499 Christ, the Lord of Hosts, Unshaken |
| HOD | 500 Lord God, to You We Give All Praise |
| Third/Distr | 836 I Walk in Danger All the Way - v1,4,5 |
| Closing | 924 Abide, O Dearest Jesus |

SERVICE OPTIONS

Service Builder contains a special Prayer of the Church for St. Michael and All Angels.



Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost October 6, 2024 (Proper 22B)

THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST KNOW HOW TO LOVE THEIR FAMILIES

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Love can cause harm. Consider the wife whose husband wants little to do with church. She loves him and does not want to upset him. So, when her husband wants her and the children to stay home Sunday morning, she complies without protest. That wife's love for her husband hurts him, her children, and herself. Or consider the father who loves his child so much that he gives the child everything that child asks for. That father's love is toxic. It is shaping that child to be a selfish, entitled adult.

In our families, it is not enough that there is love. We need to *rightly* love, to love in a way that leads to blessings for those we claim to love. This illustrates the need for followership. In Jesus we see perfect, self-sacrificial love. Jesus loves us as we are. He also loved us too much to leave us as we are. So, in love he gave his life up so that we might be holy and blameless. His love for us shapes the way we love our spouse, our children, our parents. Today we see that followers of Christ know how to love their family.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Genesis 2:18-25 – The family is the foundation of society, and marriage is the foundation of family. Marriage is not a social construct or custom but an institution of the Creator God.

*Ephesians 5:21-6:4 – St. Paul describes the various roles and responsibilities God has given to different people within a family, ways for them to demonstrate love not only for each other but also for Christ.

Mark 10:2-16 – Jesus explains that husbands and wives are to retain the bond of love, existing as one flesh. Jesus also teaches that God craves a loving relationship with children.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The Second Reading serves as the sermon text. The theme of the day talks about how followers of Christ know how to love their family. This reading demonstrates the Christian understanding of love, that it is more than sentiment. Note that Paul only uses the imperative "love" when speaking to husbands. Yet, he immediately describes it in terms of action, specifically self-sacrifice. While Paul doesn't use the word "love" when speaking to wives, he describes the actions that demonstrate love. The same holds true as he addresses parents and children. So, this reading really details the "how" in "how to love their family." Obviously, not a single family member has fulfilled their role perfectly. Fortunately, Christ has washed us all, so that he sees only blameless spouses, parents, and children.

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HYMNS

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| Opening | 505 For the Beauty of the Earth |
| HOD | 760 Oh, Blest the House |
| Third/Distr | 759 When Training Up a Child |
| Closing | 731 Oh, How Good It Is |

SERVICE OPTIONS

Service Builder contains a special responsive Prayer of the Church for marriage/family that would fit well this day.



Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost October 13, 2024 (Proper 23B)

THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST MAINTAIN PROPER PRIORITIES

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

People think that establishing priorities is about ranking things in order of importance. But it is more than that. We do not have unlimited time and energy. So, establishing priorities enables us to say “no” to things which might be good yet not truly important. Without proper priorities, one inevitably will pursue *that which is nice* while downplaying *that which is needed*.

Throughout Scripture believers are urged to prioritize. It is the heart of the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Jesus calls for prioritization when he says, “Seek *first* his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Good news: followers of Christ maintain proper priorities. Even better news: followers of Christ receive his forgiveness for all the times their priorities have been improper.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

2 Kings 5:14-27 – The prophet Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, prioritized riches over his walk with God.

Hebrews 4:12-13 – God’s Word is like a sword. It cuts through our pretensions and pride and exposes our true priorities.

*Mark 10:17-27 – Jesus helps a young man see a problem deeper than his failure to keep God’s law perfectly—that he prioritized his wealth above the call to follow Christ.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel serves as the sermon text. Certainly, the allure of money and its ability to twist priorities is a relevant topic. It’s referenced also in the first reading. However, for some the improper priority won’t be money. It might be a romantic relationship that has progressed to areas that are improper before marriage. It might be one’s work. It might be one’s children. There is *something* in *every* human heart about which, if Jesus said, “Give that up and follow me” causes sadness. It is why Jesus speaks so inclusively: “With man this is impossible...”

The young man thought we are saved by doing something. “What must I do...?” That is not how it works. Thus, achieving proper priorities is not the thing we do to “inherit eternal life.” Our hearts are too hard to ever achieve proper priorities. Thus, salvation must be a free gift. “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” And so we follow Jesus, not so much to learn how to better prioritize, but to receive grace and forgiveness for our improper priorities.

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HYMNS

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| Opening | 753 My Worth Is Not in What I Own |
| HOD | 560 Your Works, Not Mine, O Christ |
| Third/Distr | 828 Where Your Treasure Is |
| Closing | 717 What Is the World to Me |

SERVICE OPTIONS

If 753 is new to the congregation, considering having a cantor sing v1,2 and the first refrain. It is also beneficial to have the presiding minister briefly note that the refrain is sung only after v2,4, and 5.



Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost October 20, 2024 (Proper 24B)

THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST MAKE SELFLESS SACRIFICES

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

“What’s in it for me?” It’s easy to look at life through the lens of that question, to make decisions based on perceived personal benefit. Perhaps at times we look at Christianity through that lens, wondering what we will gain from following Christ. “What’s in it for me?” Jesus first disciples asked that question. They hoped that following Christ would bring prestige and honor. They assumed following Christ would make life easier. But it doesn’t work like that. Followers of Christ are called to sacrifice for the well-being of others.

“What’s in it for me?” Everything! Because of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice, followers of Christ have the peace of his forgiveness. Followers of Christ have the joy of meaningful purpose. Followers of Christ look forward to an eternity of glory in Christ’s heavenly kingdom. In Spirit-wrought gratitude, followers of Christ make selfless sacrifices with joy.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 53:10-12 – The prophet Isaiah foretold that the coming Messiah would make the ultimate sacrifice to pay for our sin.

*1 Corinthians 9:7-12,19-23 – St. Paul shares his willingness to make great sacrifices in his effort to share the gospel of Christ.

Mark 10:32-45 – To disciples who sought glory and honor, Jesus taught that his followers would make selfless sacrifices for others just as he would be sacrificed for our sins.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The second reading is the basis for this week’s sermon. Most listeners will be familiar with the second half. They are perhaps unaware of the wider context. In the first part of our text, Paul explains he has every right to ask to be compensated for his work. Even the Law of Moses stipulated that. He opens with three questions that illustrate it would be odd for someone to labor at some effort and expect not to have some sort of return. Yet, that is what Paul and his coworkers did. “We put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.” The good news about Christ moved Paul to make selfless sacrifices.

So, the more well-known paragraph is simply an extension of that concept. Paul was willing to sacrifice his upbringing (which would shape personal preferences) in order to bring the gospel to different people groups. Note the parallel between the end of verse 12 and verse 23. It all comes down to Paul being moved and motivated by the gospel. What mattered to him now? Just like Christ, only others mattered, not Paul. Thus, the repetition: “to win the Jews,” “to win those under the law,” “to win those not having the law,” “to win the weak.” May the preacher help the hearer to see that the gospel’s healing includes healing from self-absorption.

HYMNS

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| Opening | 854 Church of God, Elect and Glorious |
| HOD | 540 O Jesus So Sweet, O Jesus So Mild |
| Third/Distr | 748 Brothers, Sisters, Let Us Gladly |
| Closing | 930 Go, My Children, with My Blessing |

SERVICE OPTIONS

If 854 is new, consider having a cantor sing verse 1.