

**Yr. B, Proper 7**  
**June 24, 2018**  
**Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan**  
**St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
**1686 Words**

**Lessons:     **Job 38:1-11****  
****Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32****  
****2 Corinthians 6:1-13****  
****Mark 4:35-41****

“My brothers and sisters, *every* Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ...” said the bishop. I stood, listening carefully to every word. I had spent years of my life preparing for that moment.

What do *you* think it means to follow Jesus Christ? What does it mean to look at ourselves—*first*—as followers of Jesus? Before we see ourselves as male or female; white or black or brown; American or some other nationality; Republican or Democrat; or any other distinction; what does it mean to *first say*, “I’m following Jesus. I’m getting in the boat with Jesus.”

Come what may—storms, afflictions, and hardships—I’m going to try to live like him. Come what may—imprisonments, riots, labors, and sleepless nights—I’m going to try to think, speak, pray, and love like him. We have not signed up for ‘easy street.’ This is hard stuff. We *all* fall short...*and* we keep trying.

The bishop looked at me and three other candidates as he said, “God now calls *you* to a special ministry of servanthood...In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the *poor*, the *weak*, the *sick*, and the *lonely*.”

What was I thinking? I was thinking—like the disciples in today’s Gospel story—that I would sink. I would be swamped trying to follow Jesus as a deacon in *his* Church.

When I finished typing that sentence on Tuesday morning, I shut down my computer, put on one of my faded black shirts and the collar I wore for the first time on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006 and I headed down to Main Street to do my job.

I felt swamped. I had so many other things I needed to do, but I was convicted by these opening words of my *own* sermon, quoting from the ordination liturgy and remembering the weight of what I signed up for—first in my baptism, and then in my ordination. Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

Maybe they did.

Apparently, the bi-partisan, nationwide avalanche of protests, phone calls, emails, and social media posts led the President to issue an executive order stopping the separation of children and toddlers from their parents. He found a way to do the right thing, the thing he had said could *not* be done.

Democracy is a good thing, but it depends on people who are willing to stand up and speak out with their votes *and between their votes* as the collective conscience of the nation.

The Church has a vital role in this. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described this role clearly in 1967. “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. The Church must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool.”

King went on to say this, “If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.” (*A Knock at Midnight*, June 11, 1967)

Fast forward fifty one years and we can see just how right he was. The fastest growing segments of the U.S. population are ‘nones—n...o...n...e...s.’ and ‘dones.’ ‘Nones’ are people who choose ‘none’ to describe their religious affiliation and ‘dones’ are people who are done with religion. I meet so many people who have given up on the Church because they perceive it to be an irrelevant social club.

The ‘dones’ often feel this way because they have heard from the most televised corner of the Church, and found those leaders lacking any moral or spiritual authority. I assured a somewhat skeptical young woman on Tuesday at the protest that our Church faithfully attempts to do better than that. We attempt—and fall short—and then try again to think with the mind of Christ, and love with the heart of Christ, and serve as the hands and feet of Christ in *this world* today.

I’ll let you in on a little secret about how *I think*. When I see something immoral, like tearing children and toddlers from their parents, I ask myself, “What would I do if this was happening to *my people*?” What would I do if the tables were somehow strangely turned and my mostly white, middle class congregation was being treated like this?

I’ll tell you what I would do. I would go nuts for you. I would be in the face of every politician. I would be on T.V. and radio and on social media, demanding immediate change for you.

“Furman,” a ‘little voice’ in my head might say, “Your people would never endanger their children by traveling 2000 dangerous miles to take such a risk.” But I know ‘my people’ *and* I know about the extreme violence and poverty in places like El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

I know that *you would know* that both U.S. Law and International Law recognize the universal human right to seek asylum. I know that if our lives and the lives of *our children* were at stake, you and I would say our prayers and run for our lives.

We would run to a Christian nation where the majority of people follow Jesus Christ, *hoping* they would follow his clear teaching and example in dealing with us. And we would feel like Jesus was on our side, because *he was a child* when his parents ran for their lives, seeking asylum in Egypt. We would endure the dehumanizing labels, insults, and mocking *because...*we would trust that Christian people would stand up for their fellow Christians.

“Furman,” a politician or a news reporter might shoot back at me, “*Some* of your people are not really seeking asylum. They just want a better life.” And I would say *on your behalf*, “Fine. If that is true, just remember that it is a misdemeanor. Please be reasonable, if not merciful, in how you treat my people.”

I would say and do these things *for you* because I believe I am so called. Yet, the truth is that twelve years ago I was called in the name of Jesus Christ, to serve all people, particularly the *poor*, the *weak*, the *sick*, and the *lonely*.”

Twelve years ago I was called to study the Scriptures, and so I know that St. Paul’s “Duties of a Christian” speech begins—*not in Romans chapter 13*, but in chapter 12—where he insists that we are to hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good. We are to love one another. We are to contribute financially to the needs of others, and we are to extend hospitality to foreigners. We are to associate with the lowly. We are to overcome evil with good.

Only *then* does St. Paul remind us of our relationship with the government. When you simply cherry pick a couple of self-serving verses from the *middle* of St. Paul’s speech, you miss the magnificent climax of all these Christian duties with these unmistakable words: “Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Twelve years ago I promised to make Christ and his redemptive love known with my words and my example...like this, in the pulpit *and* on the street.

Twelve years ago I promised to interpret the needs and concerns of the world, so that *you* can respond with faith, hope, and love.

Twelve years ago I promised I would try—at all times—to show you, both with my life and my teaching, that in serving the helpless, you are serving Christ himself. It is just that serious....and just that joyful!

We can disagree about a lot of details when it comes to public policy. This is normal and expected. Yet, we *also* can do better than foolishly accepting an idea that we must choose either wide open borders or zero tolerance and family separation. There are many faithful, achievable, and reasonable choices for dealing with this complex problem.

Let me remind you of those opening words at the ordination of a deacon: “My brothers and sisters, *every* Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ...” This means every Christian is called to apply Christ’s compassionate standard to the *means* as well as the *ends* of public policy. This is what it means for the Church—*for you*—to be the conscience of the state.

You have a chance this very week. When our family voted on June 12<sup>th</sup> the poll workers said turnout was pretty good—about 20%. This may be pretty good, historically speaking, but it is pathetic. I know—from my previous career in politics—how poor turnout leads to poor results, particularly with fringe candidates who have small, but highly motivated bases.

Both parties have runoff elections for important races this Tuesday. Please participate on Tuesday or by voting absentee tomorrow. Even if you did not vote on June 12<sup>th</sup>, you are eligible to vote this week.

The common thread in today’s lessons is *God’s* response—both to Job in the Old Testament and *through Christ* to the disciples in the New Testament. In *both* cases, God is responding to an accusation that He doesn’t care...that he’s ‘asleep on the job.’ And in both cases, God speaks decisively.

To Job, God says, “Put on your pants like a man (and tell me)...where were *you* when I created (the world and showed how much I care)?” And to the disciples, Jesus says, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

The bottom line is this. We follow a God who cares...and who expects us to care also. Sometimes we feel like the disciples in today’s Gospel story. We feel like we might sink, like we will be swamped trying to follow Jesus.

Remember this: We are not alone in the boat, and neither are our most desperate sisters and brothers.

The God who created the heavens and the earth; and who halted the storm is our captain...our example...and our inspiration. And he says, plainly and lovingly, “Trust me. Follow me.”

Amen.