We are to “draw near with a true heart” (Hebrews 10: 22) to God and the only way to do that is by following the Lord Jesus Christ with our life. We may believe in God in our head but not follow Jesus and therefore not find God. A statement of faith is a good thing but it will not necessarily have us find God in our life. Many people believe in God in their head but don’t follow Him with their life. Doing good things, coming to church, reading the Bible, praying, doing mission work, is all a good thing. But if we are not following Jesus with our life we will not necessarily find God in the process. When Jesus says to the first disciples, “Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men”, (Matthew 4: 19) He was not being metaphorical, He was not just making some point. No, He says literally “Come, follow me.” He is saying that we MUST follow Him personally in our life, on a daily basis, day by day, minute by minute. To be a Christian is to be a “follower” of Jesus, literally not figuratively, daily not every once in a while. To walk the path Jesus lays out before us is to fulfill the very purpose of our life. To follow Jesus is to discover the Sovereign Plan He has for us in our life, a life plan that will bless us and give us the best possible life. To follow Jesus is to walk through the dangers and the shoals of life that could make our life a shipwreck but for following Him. And ultimately, in that day when we die, to follow Jesus means He takes our hand and walks us into eternity. We get to heaven by following Jesus, beginning today, and then choosing to follow Him every day of the rest of our life. Is our faith just a tacit tipping of our hat toward God today? Or are we actively following the Lord Jesus Christ with our life today? There is a difference...

Our Confirmation came to the church on a Thursday evening and had an entire evening of following Jesus. You have perhaps seen the sign of the fish used as a sign for Christianity. In the early, ancient Christian Church this was one of the first signs used to indicate one is a Christian. I believe it actually predates the use of a cross as a sign of being a Christian. It was used in the catacombs of ancient Rome. On the inside of it might be the letters in Greek ICHTHUS, standing for Jesus Christ, God, Son and Savior. ICHTHUS is also a derivation of the word meaning “fish”. It references Jesus’ call to every disciple of every age –“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” So it was a sign of Christ. It was a sign of the believer seeking to become also a follower of Christ. And it was specifically used in the catacombs of Rome to indicate the direction a Christian was to go in order to find other Christians who were seeking to worship God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. In an age where to publicly profess Jesus Christ as Lord resulted in persecution and being nailed to a cross, indeed to be nailed to a cross and covered with pitch and tar and burned alive in order to light Emperor Nero’s garden parties, the fish symbol was a sign of following Christ. The “pointy end” of the fish showed you the way to go, to negotiate your way through the catacombs and into the presence of God with other Christians.

So posted throughout our church were fish symbols, ICHTHUS, standing for “ Jesus Christ, God, Son and Savior”. And the class followed where Jesus led. And they went to the bell tower,
and they went to the sanctuary, and they were led to the chapel. And there on that Thursday evening the entire class was challenged to follow Jesus with their lives, to believe on HIM, to receive Christ as God, Son and Savior within their heart. And each one in turn, having followed where Jesus led, accepted Christ and committed their lives to following Him on a daily basis. Please note: it’s not a “one shot deal”. It isn’t about committing your life long ago to Jesus but not following Him today. No, its following the sign of the fish, following the Living Lord Jesus Christ, each day, every day. Where HE leads I will follow. What He directs I will do. What He guides me to speak, I will say. That’s Christianity. That’s what these young people have committed their lives to do and to be today.

Now the Bible passage from the New Testament book of Hebrews, puts it this way. We have confidence to enter into the sanctuary, to enter into the presence of a Holy God, through the blood of Jesus. We have confidence to enter into God’s presence, to be with Him forever, through the “new and living way” which Jesus has opened for us. Jesus comes and Jesus takes up residency within our heart. We receive HIM into our life and are guided by Him personally. This is literal not a metaphor. This is HIS presence in us guiding, leading and directing us every step along the way of life. And because we follow HIM, because we hearken to His voice and His leading, then we can “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10: 22) And because of His leading as His followers we can hold fast our confession of faith and we can stir one another up to good works in His name and we can meet together in worship to find and discover HIM and His presence here.

But it is easy to get disconnected from Jesus. We are too busy. We become too distracted. We are tired. We begin well but our passion wanes. O, to be sure, we still believe at least somewhere in our head. And we still want to get to heaven one day. And somehow magically we want our children and our friends to believe. But we may wake up one morning to discover that in point of fact we are VERY far away from Jesus. It may shock us how small He has become. It can be a rude awakening that little by little like the one sheep nibbling on grass we can discover ourselves on a faraway hill and the Good Shepherd is nowhere to be found. Its not about just believing in your head. Its about following Jesus. Its about being with HIM. Where HE is His servant shall be also. Its about drawing near to God through Christ.

So the question with which I end is this—Where are we in relation to the Lord Jesus today? Are we following close by His side? Are we pointed by the ICTHUS fish in the right direction? Are we following His plan? Hearkening to His voice? Directed by the Spirit? Or does HE seem very far away indeed? O sheep, where is the Good Shepherd? O Christian, where do you find yourself in relation to Jesus TODAY?

Let us draw near. With a true heart. In full assurance of faith. Wherever you are, draw near to HIM. For my beloved, there is a difference between knowing about Jesus and actually following HIM! That’s what our wonderful Confirmation Class reminded me of this year. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!