

“Christ has given you an example to follow.” When the Kansas City Chiefs won the Super Bowl and became the champions of the National Football League this past February, it was very common for you to hear, **“We won! We are the champions!”** Thousands and probably millions of people identified the Chiefs victory as **their** victory. To share in the victory of the Chiefs all they had to do was claim loyalty to the team, claim to be a fan. To be a Chiefs fan you don’t have to watch all the games, you don’t have to live in Kansas City or in the surrounding region, and you don’t even have to wear a Chiefs t-shirt from time to time. All you have to do is say, **“The Chiefs are my team.”** Fandom is easy. You get to choose your level of attachment and involvement. You can spend as little or as much time as you want on the team. You don’t even have to be a fan when the team is losing—you can just hop on the bandwagon only when they are winning.

Being a member of the so-called **“Chiefs Kingdom”** is nothing like being a member of the **“Kingdom of Heaven.”** Being a fan is nothing like being a Christian. Being a Christian takes a lifelong, all-in commitment of everything you are and everything you have. To be a fan of Patrick Mahomes you do not need to touch a football or even get your butt off a couch. But to be a Christian you cannot just check the box **“Christian”** on a survey. You cannot just show up to worship. To be a Christian you have to follow Jesus Christ and imitate him in your life. You have to be his disciple—his apprentice, learning from him how to live. As the apostle Peter said, **“Christ has given you an example to follow.”** Being a Christian involves a radical merging and uniting with Christ and his life. So radical that the apostle Paul can say, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives within me.”** This does not and cannot happen in fandom. Imagine if to be a member of the so-called **“Chiefs Kingdom”** you had to workout, diet, practice, and study film like Patrick Mahomes, everyday? How many members of the **“Chiefs Kingdom”** would there be? Would you be one?

The apostle Peter was there for every step of Christ’s journey. Peter was there at Jesus’s final meal. Peter was there in the garden the night of Christ’s arrest. Peter was there, swinging his sword when Jesus was getting arrested, almost killing the man whom Christ would then heal. Peter was there, as Jesus rebuked him, **“Put your sword away! Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.”** Peter was there, lying three times and denying ever knowing Christ, while Christ was being sentenced to death. Peter was there, hiding in the shadows and standing far off as Jesus was crucified. Peter was there, weeping and crying, knowing that he had failed. Peter was there, being forgiven by the resurrected Christ and being called to follow him once again.

Peter knew he had utterly failed in his calling because he knew he was being called to follow Christ’s example. Peter knew he was supposed to go with Jesus and live like him. Peter said to Jesus before his own catastrophic failures, **“I am ready to go to prison and death with you!”** Peter knew this was the calling. Peter knew he was supposed to walk with Jesus, learn from him, and imitate and live like him in everything. But Peter had not prayed for strength in the garden of Gethsemane, he had only slept and so his flesh overpowered the Spirit. Peter failed to follow, he failed to imitate Jesus’s example, but Peter repented, picked up the pieces and got back on the path of living like Jesus.

And as the years went by, Peter learned to preach like Jesus, heal like Jesus, throw out demons like Jesus, raise the dead like Jesus, love like Jesus, sacrifice like Jesus, and even die like Jesus. Peter faithfully and trustingly watched his own wife die like Jesus, urging her to remember the Lord Jesus and his example. Peter himself was then crucified, hung on a cross, killed just like Jesus. It is this Peter who writes to us, **“Christ has given you an example to follow.”**

When Christ was arrested he did not fight back, in fact he healed one of the men who was there to hurt and arrest him. When Christ was on trial, he did not say a word to defend himself. When Christ was whipped by the soldiers, he did not strike back. When Christ was being nailed to a cross, he forgave the sins of his enemies. When Christ was hanging from the cross, dying, he entrusted himself to his heavenly Father. Christ humbled himself at every turn, always living by faith, hope, and love.

Too often we Christians look at the life of Christ and think it was a one-time, special, unique thing, as if Christ’s behavior was only for him. But the apostle Peter reveals this to be wrong, completely wrong, deadly wrong. **“Christ has given you an example to follow.”** Christ did not die on the cross so that you would not have to. He died on the cross to bring you back to himself and to empower you to die on your own cross. Christ did not love and forgive you so that you could sit back and thank him. He loved and forgave you so that you would love and forgive others. Christ has shown you how to respond to evil. Christ has shown you how to respond to fear. Christ has shown you how to turn the other cheek. Christ has shown you how to love your enemies. Christ has shown you how to live by faith. Christ has shown you how to entrust yourself into the hands of your heavenly Father.

We are sick and diseased, stricken by the terminal illness of evil. Evil has captured and possessed our hearts, filling us with arrogance, fear, and violence. We are stuck and imprisoned in cycles of greed and hate. Christ entered into this and has set us free and healed us of this sickness through his own wounds, life, and example. **“By his wounds you were healed.”** Christ took our arrogance, fear, and violence and absorbed it into his own body. He did not fight back, he did not defend himself, he turned the other cheek, loved his enemies, and trusted in his heavenly Father. He took the evil within us and did not throw it back in our faces as we deserved. He drew the evil out of us and destroyed it and conquered it with his faithful love.

You have been set free and healed of the evil that once possessed your heart so you can live like Christ. We live in a world of evil people, a world of evil rulers, a world of evil bosses, a world of evil family members. And Peter says to you, **“Christ has given you an example to follow.”** As you face this evil world, face it like Christ did. **“Humble yourself”** before everyone—before the rulers, before your bosses, and before your family. Stop defending yourself. Stop fighting back. Stop running away. Put yourself into your heavenly Father’s hands. You are safe there. Stand firm in love. Turn the other cheek, love your enemies, and forgive those who are hurting you.

You are not called to be a fan or admirer of Christ, you are called to be his follower. You have been united with Christ in Baptism—you have become one with him, your life is now inseparable from his, he dwells within you—you are his. Therefore, you must live as he lived. You must do what he did. You must imitate him in everything. **“Christ has given you an example to follow.”** So, go follow his example, go be what he has made you to be. **Amen.**