

***Shameful Christianity***  
By Rev. Jonathan A. Malone

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**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent  
Mark 8:31-38**

***“... You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”***

***Movement 1 – Walking on the Sunny Side of the Street***

If all is going well, don't change a thing. “If it ain't broke, don't fix it!” This is the bliss of ignorance, and the joy of the status quo. If everything is good and working well, than we shouldn't change anything, right? It is like taking a car to a mechanic for an oil change. On the one hand you would like to know if your wheels are falling off, or if something else bad is happening. But on the other hand, if your car is working well, and you don't notice anything wrong, then why even ask the mechanic to look for things to fix? Ignorance is indeed bliss.

We have heard this when the automobile was made, when the cell phone was developed, when the Palm Pilot was produced. Paper is fine, horses are fine, and a normal telephone is fine, so why try to fix or make better what already works so well? Ignorance is bliss, we don't want to look under the carpet, and we don't want to imagine that things could be better.

So many churches also cry out this same mantra. Everyone seems content, we don't have a lot of change, and we don't have a lot of conflict, because change brings conflict. Nothing seems broken so we don't need to fix it. Forget that a new member hasn't joined in ten years, forget that mission giving hasn't changed in ten years, and forget that your pastor has been preaching the same sermon for ten years. We are walking on a treadmill that is pointed towards such an idyllic view that we don't want to turn change, or move. After all, if all is going well, then we shouldn't change a thing.

***Movement 2 – The First View: The Happy Years Following Jesus***

With Jesus, everything was going well, or at least the disciples thought so. Jesus had been healing people, he had been offering great teachings, and he had been taking the disciples for a wonderful, although sometime uncertain, ride. Everything was going well with Jesus. Some of the disciples felt and hoped that soon Jesus would really reach out, reach up, and claim leadership of Jerusalem and of the Jews. Some felt that soon Jesus would reach up even farther and claim leadership over Rome. Some felt that soon Jesus would reach up even farther and claim the reign of God in the here and now. No matter what Jesus was going to do, they were enjoying the ride. Jesus healed people, he was popular, and he let his close and personal friends walk with him. Everything was going well.

It is like that feeling you get when you find a very charismatic leader, one who lights up a room when he or she enters into it, one who always seems to have good ideas, a sharp wit, and clean, straight teeth, and one who smells of success. You want to be with that leader, you want to be around that person and be seen and noticed with someone of such high regard. And when you do break into the inner entourage, when you are accepted into the inner ring, then everything

goes well for you because it goes well for your idol.

Or it is like the bliss of newlyweds. Those who still carry the joy and the dream in their eyes when they gaze upon each other. Thoughts of arguments, of sighing, of perseverance and hard work are nary upon their thoughts. Only love... true love.

Or it was like when Homer Simpson joined the stonemason's movement. He was having a blast going from beer blast, to keg parties, to AA meetings, to beer balls. He could not imagine anything going wrong.

With all of these, things were going well, and everything looked good.

This was where the disciples were with Jesus. They looked at him as their ticket to fame, as their messiah, as their savior. They considered how well things were going and assumed that things were only going to get better. They were on a treadmill, and that treadmill was pointed right at Jesus, and they started to soar and fly. With Jesus, everything was going well.

### ***Movement 3 – The Second View: Harsh Predictions of Hard Years***

But then Jesus had to rock his own boat. For whatever reason, Jesus had to place his hands on the controls and stop the treadmill altogether. He had to rock his own boat. Jesus had just worked up the disciples asking them about his own identity. You could almost imagine it as a pep rally. He had walked with disciples quite a distance north from Jerusalem. He had just healed a man from blindness as he had healed so many before. Then he asks, "Who do you say that I am." Can you imagine the call and response? Am I Elijah? No! Am I John the Baptist? No! Who do you say that I am? The Messiah! The Messiah! The Messiah! (Paraphrased for dramatics) The disciples are moving, and full of excitement. Finally, Jesus admits what they have been waiting to hear out loud. Finally, Jesus owns who he really is and has been called to be. No more secrets but now full glory. Oh, the disciples are full of excitement when Jesus declares that he will be handed over to the authorities, and killed.

You can imagine the disciples stopping in their tracks. You can almost feel their gloom and disappointment. Maybe you can understand Peter's reaction. Peter rebukes Jesus in the same way that Jesus rebuked unclean spirits out of others. "There must be a spirit in you, Jesus, because that is not the way and the speech of the Messiah we expect." Peter called for a leader who would continue to heal and speak truth to the power of the temple and of Rome. Instead Jesus spoke the truth to the power that controlled Peter's ideas and visions, the way of the world. Peter wanted a leader who would continue in the limelight and glory. Instead Jesus turned toward the shadows and the sacrifice. Peter wanted a leader who would bring fame and Jesus offered shame. You can imagine Peter's rebuke in response to Jesus' words.

Jesus went and rocked his own boat. He said powerful words, which can never be taken back. He opened Pandora's box, let the real truth about him out and now things will never be the same. One commentator described this moment as a turning point in Jesus' ministry through the gospel of Mark. It is from here that Jesus will walk toward Jerusalem, knowing what lies ahead. You see up until this point in the gospel of Mark, Jesus was quiet about himself. Jesus silenced the spirits when they tried to declare the name of Christ. Jesus urged those he had healed to keep this good news to themselves, he was quiet about himself. But now he is open and doesn't bear the good and happy and glorious end that the disciples expect. Jesus took what was going well, and rocked the boat, offered a gloomy view and changed everything.

### ***Movement 4 – What do we "See" as a Church?***

We are given two different visions of discipleship. We are given two different ways to see and understand what it means to follow Jesus. We are given a view of discipleship of miracles, bliss and fame, and on the other hand we have a view of discipleship that is hardship, sacrifice and loss. The commentator and scholar David Barr suggests what is happening is similar to the experience of the blind man who Jesus healed just before he opened up his messianic can of worms. Do you remember the blind man? (Mark 8:22-26) This was the blind

man that was healed twice. The first time, Jesus touched his eyes and everyone looked like trees walking. Everyone was blurred and out of focus. This is much like the first part of Jesus' ministry. Everything was blurred, was dazed, and out of focus. The vision of fame, glory, and worldly power was clouding the disciple's view of Jesus. But then Jesus touched the eyes of the man again and he could see clearly. Then Jesus offered a deeper teaching about himself, and we now see clearly whom Jesus is and what it is he is going to do. We have two visions of Christ, one blurry and one clear.

Do you see the difference between the two? Do you see how the glitz, glimmer, and glory view of Christ is the one that we so often reach for? We don't want this other vision of Christ. This vision of shame, defeat and death is not what we expected. Think of two churches side by side. One is well polished, great music program, great preaching, very clean and beautiful people, who are well organized, focused and ready to offer you every service that the church can offer. We will watch your kids for Christ, we will show movies for Christ, we will serve you food for Christ, and we will give you a message for Christ. We will give you all the physical and mental joy that one could receive through Christ. The other church is dwarfed in the shadow of the clean and well-polished church. Its members are disorganized, the plaster is peeling off of its walls, the focus is varied and they have nothing to offer. Instead, they tell you, we have a family that needs help finding suitable healthcare, we have a member who can not take care of her yard and needs help, we have children who need tutors, we have members who need food, and we have neighbors who are crying for a hand. Do you see the two different views of the church and of Christ? We have two different visions of Christ. Which Jesus do you want to see? Which Jesus do you want to follow? We are given two different visions of discipleship before us.

### ***Movement 5 – Following Jesus / Following Peter***

We have to ask ourselves if we want to stay with Peter's view of Jesus or with the Jesus that continues in scripture. We have to ask ourselves if we want to see the easy Jesus or the shameful Jesus. This is the choice we are faced with daily in our discipleship. Remember last week, we learned how God is guiding Jesus? Today we see what it looks like to truly follow Jesus and God. We can take up our cross; we can give up the world and walk with Jesus. Or we can take up our glory, we can fall into the temptation of the wilderness and make Jesus a rock star, a super star for the world and live into that kind of discipleship. Why do you think it is that Jesus calls Peter Satan? Jesus hears Peter's rebuke, and thinks, I have heard this before, I have seen this temptation before and it was in the desert. Jesus resisted it then and he resists it now. The show-stopping number that Judas sings in *Jesus Christ Superstar* questions Christ's path and lack of fame just as Peter's rebuke questions Jesus. But that is the path before us and that is the choice before us that Jesus offers to all of us.

So will you follow Jesus into the desert? Will you give up the opportunity to relax for the opportunity to serve? Will you take your vacation and make it a mission? Will you take your social dinner and make it a soup dinner for the homeless? Will you continue to say "no" to the world and "yes" to Jesus? Will you keep yourself from laughing at the racist, off color, sexist joke, even though everyone around you is laughing? Will you lift up those in the world who have been cast down? Will you let go of your anger, your bitterness, and your greed and desire to be right to follow Christ? This is a shameful Christianity that Jesus calls us to walk. It is a Christianity that knows defeat that knows surrender and that knows sacrifice. It is the path that Christ calls us to walk with him. It does not make sense, because it is not a path of success. It does not make sense because it is not a path to the glory of the world. It is what the Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard calls the teleological suspension of the ethical. We let go of what would be right in the eyes and values of the world so that we can take up what it is that God is calling us to be and to do. We suspend the world for the end of the cross.

We could be a church that offers the glory without the sacrifice. Or we could be a church that follows the Messiah who was handed over, sacrificed, and killed by the powers and

principalities of the world. We could be a disciple that watches Christ or we could be a disciple that walks with Christ. Who do you want to be? Where do you want to set your mind in your faith? Do you want to stay with the Jesus Peter sees or with the Jesus that calls you and calls me?

### ***Movement 6 – Living Into that Kingdom***

All Jesus asks is our life. This is not an easy task before us. I often feel that we should try to talk people out of being Christians, because the high cost of discipleship. I often feel that we should warn people that when they are saying, “yes” to Christ, they are saying “no” to the life that promises comfort and ease. That is what Jesus asks as he turns and walks towards Jerusalem. Jesus asks that we take up our own cross and walk with him in all parts of our lives. We let go of our desire to control, we let go of our desire to look important, successful and prominent in the world, and we walk with Christ.

The doctor David Hilfiker walked with Christ when he felt the call. He was a general practitioner in the Midwest and felt the pull to work with the homeless. So he moved his family to a rough section of D.C., and not only did he offer medical care for homeless men and women, he lived there. With others, Hilfiker built a shelter for men and lived in that shelter with the men. That shelter, Christ House is still serving people in need today. Hilfiker gave up his life to live with Christ.

This is what Jesus asks of each one of you and of us as a church. We are given grace and it is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, costly. It is grace that offers life and takes life. It is grace that calls for discipleship as it offers salvation. It is grace that calls you to look at the cross and follow Jesus up to the cross as well.

This is the final martyrdom of the Anabaptists and the early Baptist. This is the shameful Christianity that we are called to walk. But remember that we do not end with Christ’s death. We walk to the tomb when our shame, when our burdens and when our trials are greatest and we see that the tomb is empty! The glory of Christ will be experienced when all is lost, when all is sacrificed, and when the true life of Christ is given.

AMEN