

MARK 8:34-38

NOT A FAN, BUT A FOLLOWER

“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”¹

Too many church members profess themselves to be a fan of Jesus; too few are followers. Despite a plethora of “God talk” among church members professing allegiance to the Master, there appears to be little obedience to His commands. Perhaps this is the natural outgrowth of the unwillingness to make commitments in contemporary society; perhaps it expresses a rebellious spirit that refuses to submit to His reign. Whatever the reason, it is high time for the professed people of God to follow Him whom they claim to love.

It was demanding to follow the Master in the early days of the Faith; it is no less demanding to follow Him today—if we follow according to His will. Unlike many who seek to “celebrate Jesus”—whatever the meaning of that phrase—the Master has never lowered the demand for total commitment in order to make following Him more palatable. Thus, there is a dramatic contrast between the call for discipleship issued among the churches in this day and the call for discipleship Jesus Himself issues. I fear that many who proclaim the Word seek to create fans of Jesus—people who seek happiness and personal comfort. The Master seeks followers—people who are committed, courageous and conscientious in service to Him.

In the churches of this day, we sing, “I can hear my Saviour calling, ‘Take thy cross and follow, follow Me’”; but if that involves giving Him reign over our will, we resist. We sing, “I’ll go with Him through the garden,” and somehow avoid praying either corporately or individually. We sing, “I’ll go with Him through the judgement,” but we demur if following entails sacrifice. “All for Jesus! All for Jesus!” we sing, but we cling tightly to the fiction of our own will.

It is Easter, and though presently the churches of our land appear to be captive to a timidity that marked the disciples following the crucifixion, I could wish that somehow we might recapture the thrill of His conquest of death and the courage that infused disheartened disciples after that first Easter. The disciples were dispirited, intimidated into silence, cowed by the religious and civil leaders. Huddled in gloomy enclaves, they silently grieved at His absence. Some of the women who had followed Him vowed to honour His body by providing the funerary rituals expected in that society. Talking in hushed whispers, they wondered who would roll back the massive stone—a stone weighing a tonne or more—so they could fulfil their task.

When they arrived at the tomb, they were astonished to see that the stone was rolled back. Creeping closer, they peered into the dark recess and were startled to see a young man clothed in white sitting on the right side of the tomb. He calmed their racing hearts, addressing their unspoken question, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you” [MARK 16:6, 7].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Breathless from running all the way from the tomb, the women entered the room where the disciples had hidden themselves. Intimidated by the threats of religious and civic leaders, the once-bold disciples spoke in hushed tones and sat in gloomy dimness, shielding themselves from prying eyes. Barely able to speak in their astonishment, the women blurted out that the tomb was empty—the Master was not there! The announcement couldn't be absorbed; startled looks painted the faces of the doubting disciples. Seeming to wake from their astonishment, Peter and John did not wait to hear all that was being said. Rushing out the door, the two men sprinted through the narrow streets, all the while wondering what this could mean even as they raced toward the tomb. As the tomb hove into view, it was apparent that the report the women had brought was accurate—the stone was indeed rolled back from the opening.

John hesitated at the entrance to the tomb, stooping to peer into the darkness; but Peter pushed past him and rushed into the tomb. As his eyes adjusted to the gloom, he saw the linen cloths collapsed inward on themselves. At almost the same time, he noticed the face cloth folded neatly and laid aside as though the Master had awakened after a restful sleep. Emboldened by Peter's brash rush into the tomb, John also went in and saw all that Peter had seen. Though they saw all this and believed, they still could not understand—their minds were overwhelmed by information that defied human understanding.

Something happened to Peter and John, just as something happened to the remainder of the disciples in the days immediately following that day. Mary Magdalene and a woman identified as "the other Mary"—the mother of James and Joseph [see MATTHEW 27:56; 61]—peered into the empty tomb and met the Risen Master. They had even fallen at His feet, clasping Him tightly until He commanded them to quit clinging to Him [MATTHEW 28:1-10]. Salome had also been with them; like them, she had heard the angel's gladsome announcement that He was risen [MARK 16:1-7]. Doctor Luke tells us that Joanna was also with the others at the tomb [LUKE 24:10].

Later, the Risen Master walked with two disciples, one of whom was named Cleopas. The Lord instructed them concerning His resurrection using the Word, reminding them of truths they had failed to remember or had ignored at earlier times [see MARK 15:12, 13; LUKE 24:13-35]. That same evening, the disciples were gathered in one place, with the exception of Thomas. Though the door was locked due to their fear of the authorities, suddenly, Jesus was standing in their midst. Startled doesn't begin to describe what they experienced. At that time, the Master commissioned them, blessing and enduing them with His Spirit [see LUKE 24:36-49; JOHN 20:19-23]. Eight days later, Jesus again appeared to them, and this time Thomas was with them. Jesus, knowing his doubts, invited Thomas to touch his hands and to push his hand into the place where the spear had pierced his body [see JOHN 20:26-29].

In the weeks between His resurrection and His ascension, Jesus appeared to multiple individuals. Paul recalled His appearances when He encouraged the Corinthian Christians to live in anticipation of the Master's victory. The Apostle to the Gentiles wrote these words, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-10].

Before His Passion, Jesus had many fans. You will perhaps recall that as He entered Jerusalem, we are informed that the adoring crowds “spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.” All the while, the crowds that accompanied the Master “were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest’ [MATTHEW 21:8,9]. The crowd was so excited to be in His presence. When the growing throng entered the city, seeing the carnival atmosphere some people asked what was going on; people in the procession excitedly explained to them, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee” [MATTHEW 21:10]. One cannot read that account without concluding that the crowds were excited just to be in His presence.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus had often been the recipient of the praise of adoring crowds; but He had never committed Himself to them. He had received wild adulation from idolising mobs; however, He had refused to permit Himself to take such praise seriously. Having fed a large crowd on one occasion, the people decided to take action. Because they had witnessed a great miracle, they reasoned, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world” [JOHN 6:14b]. They decided that He was the one promised by Moses. You may recall that the Lawgiver had written, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen” [DEUTERONOMY 18:15]. We might be tempted to imagine that Jesus would be pleased that they wanted to honour Him, giving Him recognition. However, we read that instead He acted swiftly to stop their attempt to enthrone Him. “Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself” [JOHN 6:15].

After removing Himself from the situation, the mob sought Him out on the other side of the sea. When they found Him, He was quite blunt with them. He responded sharply to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” [JOHN 6:26]. This makes sense when we read something concerning the response of people who had witnessed the signs He provided. Listen to a portion of an early chapter from this book. “When [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. But Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people, and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man” [JOHN 2:23-25].

Jesus was not prepared to commit Himself to the adoring crowds. They were fans, not followers. They were willing to hail Him as the Prophet; but they were focused on what they could obtain and not on the cost of following Him. Tragically, matters remain at that level even in this day. Like so many in this day, the crowds were willing to associate with the Master so long as they thought they could get something from Him. They were willing to worship for what they imagined that He could give; like so many today, they sought the gift and not the Giver.

Jesus never sought fans; He discouraged those who would treat association with Him casually. We read of some individuals who thought that following Jesus would be great fun. Here is the account. “As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Yet another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God’” [LUKE 9:57-62].

Ask yourself if you would serve Jesus if there were no benefit for your service to Him. That is the essence Jesus' words in our text. "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" [MARK 8:34-38].

I've observed the church scene for several decades now. I listen to my own requests of God, and I'm dismayed at how my prayer life is often co-opted by attitudes inimical to the Faith. So very often, it seems that my Christianity consists of seeking ease for myself, a comfortable lifestyle for my family or avoiding challenges. However, the text puts the lie to such an approach to the Faith. Jesus nowhere promises to shower me with ease or material comforts or to shield me from challenges. The text presents quite the opposite.

I've often marvelled at the account of an incident in the life of the Apostle Paul on his initial missionary journey. Paul was stoned and left for dead. The disciples were stunned, standing about uncertain what they should do when he got up from the ground. It was as though God said, "Paul, what are you doing here? I didn't call you home! You have work to do! Get back down there and finish what you began!" So, Paul got up, went back into the city where the mob had seized him, and "on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe" [ACTS 14:20b]. Take special note of Doctor Luke's account of what happened next. "When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" [ACTS 14:21-22]. Did you catch the apostolic message of encouragement? "Continue in the Faith, because tribulations mark our entry into the Kingdom of God."

Modern Christians want a symmetrical religion that provides tidy answers to all of life's complex problems. We imagine that we can demand of God answers to every challenge we face and He will comply with our demands. Jesus was not in the habit of giving answers. It is reported that Jesus is asked 183 Questions in the Gospels. He answers just three of them—and He asks 307 questions in return. The Bible is not an instruction manual for Planet Earth—it is the story of what God has done for us.² Moreover, while God has enriched us in so many ways, material enrichment is not often in the offing. Whilst He has become for us wisdom, we must still meet the challenges that are common to mankind. As Christians we must be reminded that, "We walk by faith, not by sight" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:7].

On a web site I visit occasionally, a pastor recently cautioned other pastors not to preach too aggressively and to avoid naming sins on Easter Sunday. He noted that you draw more flies with honey than with vinegar. My immediate response was that Jesus was not seeking flies, but followers. Likewise, the preacher who would honour the Master seeks disciples, not flies. Could that be the problem facing modern churches—modern pastors endeavour to attract those who want to take rather than those willing to serve? Perhaps we have invested too much energy in a vain attempt at pandering to the spirit of this age. Perhaps pragmatism has prevailed and pastors have decided that gathering a crowd is more important than speaking the truth in love.

² See Marvin Olasky, "Christianity Is Not a Tucked-in-Tight Religion," Townhall.com, April 19, 2011, http://townhall.com/columnists/marvinolasky/2011/04/19/christianity_is_not_a_tucked-in-tight_religion, accessed April 19, 2011

I'm not distinguished by playing it safe when delivering a message. In the ministry of the Word, I endeavour to be a risk taker. I do not seek to be controversial for the sake of controversy—I will do almost anything to avoid a conflict, though I pray I never shrink from speaking the truth. I have no message consisting of five easy steps to a happy or prosperous life. I would lie if I told you that your happiness or material comfort to ensure that you enjoy ease in this life is of any great moment to God. The Word of God is quite concerned for you to honour Him by living righteously—and that does not necessarily entail accumulating material goods.

It is significant, even vital for the Christian who longs to please God, to note that in Christ the Lord, the believer is offered joy. Nowhere are we promised happiness. Perhaps it is necessary for the sake of clarity to distinguish between happiness and joy. “Happiness” speaks of how you feel given the particular conditions in which you happen to find yourself. Joy is a settled condition, independent of given situations. Happiness ebbs and flows; joy is forever. Happiness is ephemeral, transient, always fleeting like a will ‘o the wisp; joy is permanent.

I've said all that to bring us back to the words of the Master—words, which undoubtedly were frequently recalled by Peter after the Resurrection. The Resurrection of Jesus was the singular event that transformed Peter from the man who quailed before a little girl into the bold preacher of Pentecost. Because the Master was alive, Peter was turned from one who fled at the thought of accusations by the religious leaders into the bold witness who would stand before the highest powers in the land proclaiming, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” [ACTS 4:19, 20]. Peter would become the man who would soon stand before the Jewish Council and boldly declare, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” [ACTS 5:29-32]. It is Peter's memories of the Master that Mark has written down for our edification.

Peter was transformed by the Risen Christ, just as you also can be transformed by this same Christ. You can see this holy Faith as a demanding exercise, even a duty that must be performed occasionally, or you can see it as the natural expression of gratitude flowing from a transformed life. You can live pursuing your own desires and never finding fulfilment, or you can live to discover the will of the Living Saviour and find rich fulfilment that can never be matched. It depends on what Easter means to you. Is Easter the opportunity to rejoice in the knowledge that Christ lives? Or is the day simply a religious holiday that must be observed?

EASTER IS A CALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST — Above all else, Easter is a call to follow the Master. It would be one thing to admire Jesus because of His sacrifice. Surely, there is no one so hardened by the events of this fallen life that they cannot admire sacrifice for the welfare of another! The Saviour sacrificed His life—not for a few, but for all mankind. John states that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” [JOHN 3:16]. Indeed, we are taught, “The Father has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world” [1 JOHN 4:14]. Through His sacrifice, Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” [1 JOHN 2:2].

However, the Master did not merely present His life as a sacrifice for sin, but He was “appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead” [ROMANS 1:4 NET BIBLE]. He demonstrated that He was very God by conquering death. Therefore, we are compelled by truth to follow Him wherever He leads us.

Recall that the Lord commanded that His disciples must follow Him. Jesus commanded, “If you love me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” There could be no equivocating when He issues a command.

Jesus continued, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in Me, and I in you. Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.’ Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words. And the word that you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me’” [JOHN 14:15-24].

Let me stress the point once again by referring you to another of the Master’s sayings. “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” [JOHN 15:10]. Love for the Master is revealed through obedience to His commands. One must make a decision whether they are prepared for rejection by those identified with the world in order to be fully identified as followers of the Christ. Another saying of Jesus bears this out. It is similar to the saying recorded in the text, but the differences point out the necessity of making an informed decision.

Here is the hard saying Jesus delivered. Listen carefully. “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” [LUKE 14:26-33].

Underscore in your mind that the call to discipleship is not a casual call; the call to discipleship anticipates difficulties and expects the follower to obey what the Lord commands. John instructs us, “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” [1 JOHN 2:1-6].

Again, the Apostle of Love has written, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” [1 JOHN 5:1-3].

On another occasion, John wrote, “I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” [2 JOHN 4-11].

FOLLOWING CHRIST DEMANDS THAT WE LIVE WITH RADICAL ABANDON — Though the point should be obvious, permit me to state the matter bluntly: following Christ demands that we live with radical abandon. There can be no half-hearted, pussyfooting, hesitating if you will be a follower of the Christ. It is not my purpose to encourage you to be lax in this most holy Faith. It is a hard thing to hear, but there is a divine curse on slackness. God, speaking through Jeremiah has said, “Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness” [JEREMIAH 48:10].

It is one thing when the Master demands that those who would follow must deny themselves; it is quite another when He demands that anyone who would follow must “take up his cross and follow.” Our culture has become morally flaccid, intellectually anaemic and spiritually debilitated. Increasingly, it becomes evident that modern society is ethically enervated. There was a time, and it wasn’t all that long ago, when leaders did not have to challenge the nation to sacrifice—it was anticipated that the hearty individuals who were our forebears would assume responsibility when confronting hard tasks and demanding conditions.

Today, the apostolic call for stamina seems quaint, outlandish, easy to ignore because it is so out of touch with modern sensibilities. To encourage the young pastor of the Ephesian saints, the Apostle wrote, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” [2 TIMOTHY 2:3]. The pastor that dares to call the saints to endure hardship in this day will be dismissed as unrealistic, even uninformed. However, the pastor that fails to call the people to exhibit courage and endurance demonstrates a dreadful ignorance of the Word.

Paul also admonished Timothy, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8]. Closing his final missive to the young preacher, the Apostle gave sobering instruction when he wrote, “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” [2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5].

Jesus called the one who would follow to take up his cross. I hear people speak of the trouble that comes into every life, minimising the trouble as “my cross.” I fear that we don’t understand what the Master calls us to accept in order that we might follow Him. I fear that we believe that we are actually convinced that any displeasure or discomfort is our cross.

The Romans adopted crucifixion as the means of keeping conquered populations in subjugation. Six in ten people living under Roman rule were slaves—they had no rights. Consequently, the populace was restive, liable to explode into rebellion at any moment. In order to intimidate the restive peoples, any who appeared to threaten the empire were killed publicly. The method of choice for execution was crucifixion. The one to be crucified would carry his own crossbeam to the site of execution. This was basis for Jesus' call to take up the cross.

When the one to be crucified had taken up the cross, there was no turning back—a crucified man was never coming back. A crucified man could look in only one direction. A crucified man would have to die alone. The cross would impose its will on a crucified man. How can it be, then, that modern Christians imagine that because they avoid a vice, or think that because they once gave money to a worthy cause, or assume that because they sit in church once a week, that they are living a crucified life? The believer that accepts the Master's call no longer lives to fulfil her own will, but she lives to honour Him who called her to life. The believer will have counted the cost, and though that one cannot know with certainty all that she may be called to endure, she will not shrink from following hard after the Master.

Let me say that the world is dying to see Christians who are committed to Christ. For too long we have seen religious people, but we have not often seen godly people. The caricature of a Christian is a plastic saint who is against everything, but uncertain what he stands for. The Word presents the image of one who is utterly committed to following the Son of God.

EASTER INSTILS BOLDNESS IN ALL WHO FOLLOW THE RISEN CHRIST — I find the closing words of our text to be humbling. Jesus said, "Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." The words are humbling because they are given to each individual who wishes to be a disciple.

Too often have I been silent when I should have spoken. When the libertine exalts his immorality, let the child of God speak of purity. When the godless ridicule the Faith of Christ the Lord, let the Christian exalt the grace of God. When the pretender counsels timidity in the face of opposition, let the believer rebuke that one and live boldly as a follower of the Christ. The Crucifixion cowed the disciples. How pitiful to read of them huddled in dark rooms after the Master's death. Even after receiving the report of His resurrection, we read of the disciples, "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them 'Peace be with you'" [JOHN 20:19]. Don't think that we would be any bolder than they were—we would not.

If we will not speak to a neighbour to encourage her in the storms of daily life, we will not stand in the maelstrom. If we will not invite a colleague to the Faith over a cup of coffee, we will not be stalwart when the tempestuous winds blow against us. If we will not plead with our own children to honour Christ the Lord when they follow the course of this dying world, we will not resist the currents of life that push against us.

Something marvellous happened to change the disciples—the Resurrection of the Lord. One event transformed the disciples, changing fear into courage; this is what will transform our lives. Jesus appeared to this timid band; He commissioned them, charging them to fulfil His will in the world. The charge applies to anyone who would be a disciple. Literally, Jesus said, "Since you are going into the world in any case, disciple all people, baptising them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. Listen, I am with you always, to the end of the age" [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

When the disciples received the Spirit whom Jesus sent, they spoke boldly. Peter was filled with the Spirit and confronted the Sanhedrin with the wicked acts they had performed [ACTS 4:8 ff.]. Early in his preliminary missionary journey, Paul was filled with the Spirit, and he boldly confronted a wicked magician named Elymas who sought to turn an inquirer from the truth [ACTS 13:9 ff.]. When the religious people of Pisidian Antioch were filled with jealousy and endeavoured to speak against the Way, Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, as were all the disciples, and they were overjoyed [ACTS 13:44 ff.]. God gives boldness to those who commit to following Him. You may continue to lead a pedestrian life indistinguishable from that of the world; or you may boldly confront life, living it to the fullest. This is the promise of the Master. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” [JOHN 10:10]. This is the heritage of all who follow the Risen Saviour. For such a one, life will be an eternal Easter.

Is this your heritage? Are you a follower of the Risen Saviour? Or have you become just another cultural attendee at religious services. The call of Christ is to be born from above and into God’s Family. Without question, Jesus died because of your sin; but He was raised from the dead so that you might be declared right with the Father. This is the message we bring: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Master,’ truly believing that God raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. When you believe, you are made right with God; and by confessing you are set free.” That promise of God concludes by citing a promise reaching all the way back to the Prophet Joel. “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [see ROMANS 10:9-13].

Is He your Lord? Amen.