

February 25, 2018
Second Sunday in Lent

Being Focused and Unashamed

Mark 8:27-38

This is one of those Gospel readings which simply has too much material to preach it all in one sermon. It talks about who people say Jesus is, Peter proclaims who Jesus really is, Jesus talks of what He will do, Peter is rebuked for getting in the way of that, Jesus talks of our taking up a cross and following Him. Any of these would be fodder for several sermons. But when this is read, it's probably the last sentence that hangs in the air in a loud silence that drowns out what came before. Jesus says, *"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."*

Each one of us has been in a situation where we knew we should have said or done something boldly Christian; offered a prayer, spoken in defense of the faith, admonished a brother or sister from wrongdoing, simply witnessed to what we know of Christ, any number of things. But we didn't. And the reason we didn't is because we were ashamed of going public with our faith, and thus we were ashamed of Christ.

And it's not getting any easier as our culture moves farther and farther away from the Christian thinking and life to which the Holy Spirit calls us. The great evangelist Billy Graham passed away this week at age 99 yet some columnist at Vogue had no problem tweeting to all the world that he was evil and burning in hell because he espoused Christian virtue. Increasingly to be forthright about our faith in Christ and belief in His Word revealed in the Bible we are inviting rebuke, hatred, rejection, ostracization. The world around us is thinking it is enlightened, virtuous and even chic to reject Christ and His teaching. It tempts us to be ashamed of our savior, and we don't always deal with temptation well, do we?

So what are we to do? First off we must remember what St. Paul writes of Christ in Second Timothy: *"The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."*

Jesus is faithful to us and that means His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins—even the sin of denying Him, even the sin of faithlessness at some point. You are baptized into Christ and have received the Holy Spirit. Every day of your life, unless you utterly rejected the Spirit, He continues to call you to repentance and saving faith. Your shame and denial of Christ doesn't damn you, unless you embrace it, unless you abide there instead of abiding in Christ.

Don't take these words of Jesus lightly! He addresses them specifically to disciples, those who are rightly following Him like you and I do. It's a warning for us. When Jesus poses the question, *"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"* He is speaking of eternal life and the word forfeit is better translated as "to be made to lose" that life. This is exactly what the world is trying to do when it encourages us to be ashamed of Jesus and His Word.

How does the world do this? Well, here's a simple example increasingly taking place in our culture. A lot of folks are beginning to live in political echo chambers. Liberals watch and read liberal news outlets, keep liberal friends on social media and in real life and talk liberal talking points. Conservatives watch and read conservative news, keep conservative friends and

talk conservative points. But let me ask you, if a person from one group surrounded themselves with all the news, friends and discussions of the other group and never spoke up for their differing point of view, how long before they would start moving in the other political direction? How long before they started being ashamed of their original point of view? This is exactly what the world tries to do to us in surrounding us with worldly culture—and it surrounds us every day!

We've seen this happen with any number of church bodies. Denominations wanting to be at peace with the culture stopped proclaiming the truths of the Bible that conflict with the culture, then started bending those truths and now outright deny those truths. Why? Not because they're not true; because they are ashamed of the truth of Christ. Christians become ashamed of Christ and of His Word!

How do we combat this? What you are doing right now is a great start. You're here. Look around. Go ahead. Look at all these people who are not ashamed of Christ! Think of all the Christians gathered like this elsewhere today. You are not alone. You're not a weirdo. You're not wrong. You have nothing to be ashamed of in the world.

But that's just a bonus. Look at Christ. He became shameful before God in sin so He could save your hide. He rose to give you that eternal life with Him. His Word is true. His forgiveness is real. His return is eminent. His reign is all encompassing. His salvation is forever. His love is steadfast. He is nothing to be ashamed of. His goodness should always be voiced in great boasts of honor!

And He is faithful. He is here today speaking forgiveness to you in His true Word. He is putting His salvation physically into your mouth in His own body and blood. Let the mouth that so eagerly receives this grace here not be ashamed to speak His name in pride and love elsewhere.

These scary words of Jesus are probably the best reason I can give you for being in daily prayer and devotion. If you are daily remembering how good God is to you in Christ and are appealing to Him the forgiveness and strength of faith you know He is gracious to give, how are you going to walk out the door and be ashamed of Him? You aren't. By His power you cannot be made to lose your life—the forever life He gives you daily by your baptism into His death and resurrection. You will never be ashamed of that!

I guess it's this simple. If you don't want to be ashamed of Christ, stay focused on Christ! Knowing Him as He is for you in saving you for His kingdom, it's not possible to be ashamed. It's only by closing your eyes to Him, pushing Him away and turning your focus to the world that you can do that. Eyes on His cross, you will pick up yours, whatever it may be, and gladly, joyfully, follow Him daily into eternity.

See Jesus for who He is, the Christ who died and rose to give you life beyond death, then be ashamed of the world and follow Him.

Amen.