

Mark 8:27-38 – “*The Folly of Flip-flops*”
2nd Sunday in Lent – February 25, 2018

It's not a good thing to be known as a flip-flopper - a person who takes two different positions on the same issue. That label is thrown around a lot in politics. Granted, anyone can change their position and perspective over the course of time, but if those changes are dramatic and frequent, or done merely for personal convenience or selfish gain, then the label applies. A flip-flopper describes a person who is inconsistent, uncommitted, and cowardly; one who has no spine. Perhaps the term even originated from the cheap, flimsy rubber footwear of the same name. In today's Gospel Peter is a flip-flopper. On the one hand, he correctly identifies Jesus as the Christ, but then shortly thereafter he effectively flip-flops when he protests the Lord's statement that He Himself must suffer, die, and rise. And, of course, we know there is more to Peter's tendencies than what we see here. As we get deeper into Lent we will hear Peter with Jesus on the Mount of Olives say, “*Though they all fall away; I will never fall away . . . even if I must die with You, I will not deny You.*” And shortly thereafter in the courtyard of the high priest he flip-flopped again and did the very thing he said he wouldn't.

Jesus takes spiritual flip-flopping seriously, and that reality makes us uncomfortable because of our Peter-like tendencies to do the same. It might seem strange that before Jesus asks the disciples for their personal confession about Him, He first takes an opinion-poll, as it were. Our Lord asks them, “*Who do people say that I am?*” Of course, Jesus certainly did realize that the world misunderstood His person and work. He didn't ask the question for His own benefit, but for the benefit of His disciples. As they pointed out the world's false views, it should have been clear to them that as they undertook their tasks as the Lord's representatives in the office of apostle they would face opposition from the world. A steadfast, consistent, and courageous confession would be needed. Peter gave such a confession at that moment, but then quickly backpedaled. When he confessed rightly, Matthew's Gospel tells us that Jesus calls Peter blessed. But after his inconsistency Jesus calls him Satan saying, “*You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*” And in Matthew's Gospel there is even more. Jesus tells Peter, “*You are a hindrance to me.*” What a sudden and dramatic change of tone and events!

We have here a sobering and dramatic picture of human inconsistency – our inconsistency. We are engaged in a battle. On the one hand, we profess to be followers of Jesus and delight in confessing Him, but on the other, we struggle and fail, sometimes to a miserable, shameful degree. Think of all the situations when we have an opportunity to give a clear witness to Christ, but shrink from the task: the coach sets little league practice for 9:00 a.m. on Sunday. Do we say Sunday morning is for the Lord's worship, how about later in the day? Then there is that relative living an unchristian lifestyle. “*Dad and Mom, I'm moving in with my boyfriend.*” Do we hesitate to speak the truth in love for fear of hurting the relationship? How about that unbelieving acquaintance who spouts off about all

religions being the same, asserting that it really doesn't matter what you believe since there are "many roads to heaven? How about the boss who wants you to do something that isn't quite right: a clerk who is told to cheat the customer; the accountant who is told to alter the books; the doctor who is forced to do an abortion or a sex-change operation; the pharmacist who is forced to fill a prescription for assisted suicide pills; or the teacher who is told to pass the failing student whose daddy is on the school board? Our conscience gnaws at us. We know it's an opportunity to display our faith and the truth of God's Word. We want to be strong and bold, but we remain quiet so as not to offend, not to seem to fanatic, not to lose our job or a relationship. To that Jesus speaks a strict word of Law, "*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.*"

To us, like Peter, Jesus could rightfully say, "*Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. You do not have your mind set on the things of God, but on the things of man.*" But that's not what Jesus says. Instead, He says that He **must** *suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*" There is Gospel in that word **must**. He must do it because we couldn't do it ourselves. He said this and did this not because He wanted to consign us to Satan, but because He wanted to save us from our sins. He said this not because He looks upon us as a hindrance to Him, but because we are dear to Him and He desired to win our salvation. Divine necessity is brought about by His desire to fulfill our human need. He was willing to lose His life so that we might gain eternal life. He did not waver or hesitate. He never flip-flopped in His resolve. He will not be deterred because He is determined to do what is necessary to save us. He faithfully and consistently carried out His mission as the Savior of the world so that we sinner/saints might confess and serve Him in the world with ever-increased faithfulness and consistency. He went to the cross for us.

And He says to us, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" Can that be done, or is it an idealistic goal that can never be reached? Well, it can't be done by us. In today's Collect we admit that, praying, "*O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength.*" And then Romans 5 reminds us, "*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*" It can be done by Him **in us**. God took the action to justify us by faith in the shed blood and victorious resurrection of Jesus. We now have peace with Him and the strength to live out the Christian life in the world today with a courageous confession in word and deed. When we take up the cross, Jesus has already done the heavy lifting. He tells us "*His yoke is easy and His burden is light.*" He continues to feed us with the spiritual muscle-building nutrients of His Word and Sacraments. The world is watching and listening to us. Will they hear and see a clear, consistent confession, or people who flip-flop? God will help us. We need never be ashamed of Him, because He was never ashamed of us in Christ. Amen.

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