

Sunday, March 18, 2018 – Fifth Sunday in Lent
“Leaving Phony Facades Behind”

Mark 10: 32-34

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Analogy Structure

Adapted from the CSL Series “Leave It Behind”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

During our midweek sermons we’ve been hearing that God is calling us home, and we’ve been learning what God’s call means as we journey toward our true home in heaven. You can’t take everything with you when you travel, so some things get left behind. The title of today’s sermon is “Leaving Phony Façades Behind.” Façade. That’s a fancy French word. We don’t use it too much in our common speech but I think we all know what it means. A façade is a false appearance, a superficial appearance. It’s the front we show the world but it’s not necessarily who we really are.

I’m reminded of the preparations the city of Detroit put into hosting the 2006 Super Bowl. The city was awarded the game in 2000 by the NFL, with the expectation there would be significant capital improvements. The city promised new businesses, restaurants and hotel space. Sidewalks had to be redone, broken windows in abandoned buildings needed replacing and many buildings needed to be razed. And oh the construction, on seemingly every freeway throughout the metro area, simultaneously.

As you might have guessed, the city was unable to accomplish all of its ambitious goals in those six years, so it pulled off a large-scale operation which amounted to sweeping the proverbial dust under the rug – the entrances to abandoned buildings were cleaned and awnings were put above the doors. Light bulbs were installed in those same abandoned buildings so that the skyline shots at commercial breaks would look impressive as the blimp flew overhead. Many of the improvements undertaken were needed for years before, but not until an international audience and media would descend on the city did they really work at sprucing things up. But the city did more than put their best foot forward – they had to apply lipstick to the pig. How much time and energy was wasted trying to cover up the flaws.

If the international media coming to Detroit could spot a city trying too hard to impress, it's no wonder that God, the creator of Heaven and earth is unimpressed by our efforts to spruce up our shabby selves. He can see through the façade, he can see our flaws.

That's part of the purpose of every worship service and today our pointed purpose is to strive to leave phony façades behind and show the world who we followers of Jesus truly are. Jesus predicted to His disciples that He would be buried. Listen to the Gospel again. Jesus was going to Jerusalem "and those who followed were afraid." I don't know if they were putting on a happy face or whistling a happy tune so no one would suspect they were afraid, but deep down they were afraid. "He began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him.'" No wonder they were afraid. "Our Lord's life is going to be buried! "Will we go down with Him?" But then Jesus added one more thing, a promise that didn't sink into the disciples' heads, at least not at first. Later they got it. Jesus added, "After three days he will rise" (Mark 10:32–34). Jesus was buried so that life could arise.

Our hearts need an overhaul and a phony façade won't do. Or, as St. Paul says in Ephesians, we "were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). That's the big reason why you and I show false fronts to the world. We're afraid but we whistle a happy tune; we don't always show hope. We're guilty but we stuff our guilt, don't acknowledge it and get it out; we're often not sincere in repentance. We're ashamed of ourselves but we hide it; we forget God sees. We put on our façades. We act like we're still "dead in trespasses and sins." Walking dead. Zombies.

But those façades are phony when we really get what Jesus is about. That Bible verse says "You were dead." Past tense. The reason we can leave behind phony façades is because God has raised us and we are alive with Christ. "You were dead in... trespasses and sins... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:1, 4–5). Jesus' buried life was destined to rise. Acts 2:24 says, "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, for it was not possible for him to be held by it." When you were baptized, you were buried with Christ,

that's your buried life, and baptism raises you to newness of life just as Christ was raised. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:4–5).

So the question is why don't we live transparent, honest, lives filled with faith and hope and joy? Why doesn't that salvation poured into our lives show when we face fear or guilt or shame? Why the contradiction between who we are and what we show the world? Why not leave phony façades behind? Why not show people our true face, people alive with Christ? That's what we should pray for. In today's collect we prayed, "Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord... " "Being governed and preserved evermore in body and soul" means living in our salvation, our life in Christ. It means being people of integrity. "World, you're seeing the real person when you see me." We pray for that. Can it come to pass? You bet. Philippians 2:13 promises, "It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Phony façades, you're so out of here! In Jesus' name, amen.