

Living by Faith in a Hostile World

Part 3: Dead to Sin, Alive to God: Fearless in Confession

Romans 6:12–23 | Matthew 10:5a, 21–33

I. THE OLD MASTER STILL CALLS

When S. Truett Cathy opened his first restaurant in Hapeville, Georgia in 1946, he made a decision that everyone around him told him was bad business.

He would close on Sunday.

Not occasionally. Not when it was convenient. Every Sunday, without exception, at every location, for the entire sixty-eight years he ran the company. When Chick-fil-A moved into shopping malls in the 1960s, the Sunday closing became a point of real conflict. Mall operators wanted their anchor tenants open seven days a week. The foot traffic on Sunday was substantial. The revenue walking past a darkened Chick-fil-A window and into a competitor's door was not a rounding error. Cathy was told, more than once, that his lease arrangements were in jeopardy. He held firm.

His reason was not complicated. Sunday belonged to God. His employees deserved a day for worship and for their families. And no amount of revenue, however real, changed either of those facts.

He said so publicly. He never softened it, never reframed it in the language of brand differentiation or employee wellness or corporate values. He said: we are closed on Sunday because Sunday belongs to God. That is a confession. It is the kind of confession that costs

something in a mall on a busy afternoon, and Cathy made it for sixty-eight years without apology.

In a hostile world, the voice that argues against that kind of confession is fluent and patient. It does not ask us to renounce Christ publicly. It only asks us to stay quiet in this particular setting, to let this particular moment pass without a word, to calculate what we stand to lose and decide that the cost of confession is, right now, a little too high. The old master speaks in the language of reasonableness. And we have all heard him.

II. WE KNOW THAT VOICE

The apostle Paul names our condition with a precision that is uncomfortable to sit with:

“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”Romans 6:17–18

Once slaves of sin. That is what we were. And a slave does not negotiate with his master or weigh the cost of compliance. A slave obeys. The old master does not need our formal denial of Christ. He does not need us to stand up and announce that we have abandoned the faith. He only needs our silence, our careful non-commitment, our reliable disappearance from the conversation whenever faith becomes the subject.

We know that voice. We have heard it at work when a conversation turned to things that matter and we found something else to say. We have heard it at the dinner table when someone dismissed the resurrection as myth and we let it pass without a word. We have heard it inside ourselves, the quiet and reasonable calculation: not now, not this person, not this cost. We have looked at the Sunday mall traffic walking past our window and decided that this particular week, we would stay open.

Paul does not flinch from where that obedience leads:

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” *Romans 6:12–14*

The command “let not sin reign” only makes sense if sin is still trying to. The old master has not accepted his termination. He keeps issuing orders, and the uncomfortable truth this morning is that we keep answering them. Not always. Not in every moment. But enough that we know exactly what it feels like to calculate the cost of confession and decide, quietly, that the price is more than we want to pay today.

The wages of that answering, Paul says plainly, is death. Not merely the slow death of a faith that gradually stops speaking. The real death: separation from the God who made us, now and finally. This is not a small matter. The dominion of sin is not a minor inconvenience. It leads somewhere.

III. THE FREE GIFT

Truett Cathy did not hold that line for sixty-eight years by willpower. A man who closes his restaurant on Sunday because he is disciplined enough to do so will eventually find a Sunday when the discipline runs short. What Cathy held was not a resolution. It was a conviction about identity: whose day it was, and therefore whose he was. The closed door was not an act of self-denial. It was an act of acknowledgment. Something matters more than this. Someone has a prior claim.

This is exactly what Paul has been arguing since the beginning of Romans 6. You were buried with Christ in baptism. You were raised with him to newness of life. The old self was crucified with him. And therefore the old master’s orders have no binding force, because you do not belong to him anymore. The transfer of allegiance happened in the

font, before you were old enough to negotiate the terms. It was not a transaction you initiated or completed. It was done to you, by grace, while you were still an enemy.

And now Paul closes the argument with the clearest sentence in the chapter:

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Romans 6:22–23

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus your Lord. Not wages. Not the reward at the end of a long record of faithful confession. A gift, given freely, secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, delivered to you in water and word and bread and wine. Christ was crucified for your trespasses. He was raised for your justification. He ascended to the right hand of the Father and reigns over all things, including every conversation and every family dinner and every moment at work where the question of who you are and whose you are becomes suddenly, uncomfortably real.

You do not confess Christ in order to earn that gift. You confess him because the gift has already been given. The allegiance has already been transferred. You are not trying to close the store in order to become someone who closes the store. You are someone who knows whose day it is, and the closed door follows from that.

This is the only ground from which genuine, sustained, costly confession is possible. Not moral resolution. Not theological courage. The settled conviction, given in baptism and renewed at this table, that you belong to Christ, that sin has no more dominion over you, and that the old master’s voice, however reasonable it sounds, is speaking to someone who is no longer there.

IV. CLOSE THE STORE

Jesus sends his disciples into a world that will not always receive them well. He does not hide this. And then he says:

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”
Matthew 10:28

So what does closing the store actually look like? Not in 1946 in Hapeville, Georgia. Here. This week. For you.

It looks like this: your grandchild comes to you with a real question about death, about what happens, about whether any of it is true. And the temptation is to soften it, to hedge, to say something vague about people living on in our memories. Closing the store means looking that child in the eye and speaking the name of Jesus. Not a lecture. Not a sermon. Just the name, and what he did, and why it matters. That child may not hear it anywhere else.

It looks like this: someone you love makes a decision that contradicts everything you know to be true, and announces it at the dinner table expecting your silence or your approval. Closing the store does not mean delivering a verdict. It means speaking the truth with love, even when love is not what they want from you in that moment. Even when the silence would be so much easier.

It looks like this: the political conversation gets heated, as it always does now, and you find yourself defending your party with more passion than you have shown for your Lord in months. Closing the store means asking yourself honestly: in this conversation, am I known as a follower of Jesus Christ, or am I known as a reliable vote for one side of an argument? Our politics have become so loud that they have crowded Jesus out of the room entirely. That is a form of denial that is all the more dangerous because it does not feel like one.

It looks like this: a neighbor is going through something hard and you know exactly what they need, but you are not sure how it will be received, so you bring a casserole and say nothing about the one who actually heals. Closing the store means opening your mouth. It does not have to be eloquent. It does not have to be long. It only has to be true.

Jesus makes the promise that everything depends on:

“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”
Matthew 10:32–33

Truett Cathy died on September 8, 2014. Chick-fil-A now operates more than three thousand locations. Every one of them is closed on Sunday. The confession he made in 1946 is still being made every week, in every mall, in every city, by a darkened sign that says: something matters more than this.

You are not making your confession in your own strength. You are making it as someone who has been set free from sin and made a slave of God, as someone whose old master has no more claim, as someone who knows whose you are because you were told so in water and word before you could argue about it.

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus your Lord. Close the store. Acknowledge him. He will acknowledge you. Amen

Pastor Ron Breight Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

Join us for worship online on our Facebook page, [ChristLutheranChurchfh](#). There you can view a video recording of our 10 am Sunday service at your convenience. There is no need to register with Facebook or log in to visit our page.