

THE WALKING TEST  
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First Presbyterian Church  
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I John 1:1-2:6

Today I've got a test for you. Sorry to be so tough, but we've got to tighten this operation up around here.

Today's test, though, is not with pencil and paper, but one that you take by walking. Whether you pass or fail has to do with how well you walk. And no, this is not the test that the police make you take for sobriety, where you have to get out of the car and walk in a straight line. That's a pretty important test, too, but that is not the walking test for today.

The walking test for today has to do with the way we live the Christian life. We are tested by the way we walk the walk of Christ. "Whoever says 'I abide in Christ' ought to walk just as he walked." (I John 2:6) We test our faith by walking like Jesus.

Jesus walked. There's no doubt about this. Only in his entry into Jerusalem on the donkey is it recorded that Jesus ever used another form of land transportation besides his two strong legs. His was a purposeful walk, a walk that was going somewhere—toward Jerusalem and a cross that awaited him. His was an attentive walk, so that as he walked he noticed who was around him. He heard when beggars cried out; he noticed people that other people didn't notice. The walk of Jesus was a teaching walk. More than once we read that Jesus was walking along the road teaching his disciples. "He who would be the greatest among you must be the servant of all." That is what he taught them as he walked along and they followed.

Mostly, the walk of Jesus was a walk that approached all kinds of people. All kinds. He didn't just walk with the rich and famous. In fact, he didn't much walk with those kinds of people at all. His walk was toward high and low, rich and poor.

What Jesus did in his walking was to obliterate all the categories that we use to separate one class of people from another. You know the categories I mean: He lives in Sunnyside; she lives somewhere on East 15<sup>th</sup> Street. This one has beautiful teeth, the epitome of the orthodontist's art; the other never smiles lest you see that he can't afford to go to the dentist. The one uses good grammar; the other says "ain't" a few times too many. The kind of car we drive, the cut of our clothes, the diploma in our office, the school our kids attend, the church we go to—in those and in a thousand other ways we are constantly sizing people up, deciding whether it's somebody we want to associate with or not, deciding whether they're "our kind of people."

In his walk, Jesus obliterated all those categories. Jesus had this remarkable ability to walk up to people regardless of their status. He didn't care about their status. The untouchable leper, the woman caught in adultery, Bartimaeus the blind beggar, the Samaritan woman, tax collectors and outsiders. Jesus walked without hesitation up to all of them and so many more. They were children of God, and that was all that mattered.

First John says that to walk in the light of God is to walk like Jesus walked. The choice before us is Jesus or self-deception. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." I may think I'm a fine walker, but if I'm not walking like Jesus, I'm fooling myself.

A friend tells about being out in the woods, enjoying a hike. She was in an area that was very scenic, with lots of cliffs. It was beautiful, but also dangerous. She came upon a sign: "Dangerous cliffs ahead. Do not proceed beyond this point." And around the sign was a worn path where people had disregarded the warning and proceed on. "That warning may apply to other people, but not to me. I can handle it."

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The greatest self-deception is thinking I can do it on my own. I don't have to imitate anyone else in my walk. I'm doing quite fine on my own, thank you." We deceive ourselves.

So First John calls us to walk like Jesus. Not in self-deception, but in self-giving; not in arrogance, but in humility; not in pomposity, but penitence.

Did you read in the business section of the newspaper this week about another kind of test? It's the Waiter Test, and it's not far from the Walking Test. The Waiter Test proclaims that you can tell a lot about a person about the way that person deals with the waiter in a fancy restaurant. It tells about Steve Odland, who is now the Chief Executive

Officer for Office Depot. Thirty years ago, though, Odland was a waiter at a fancy French restaurant. He accidentally spilled a purple sorbet onto the expensive gown of an important woman at the table. “I thought I would be shot on sight,” he said. The woman, though, regained her composure, “and, in a reassuring voice, told Odland, ‘It’s OK. It wasn’t your fault.’” Odland said he learned a lesson in life that day: “You can tell a lot about a person by the way he or she treats the waiter.”

Raytheon CEO Bill Swanson agrees: “A person who is nice to you but rude to the waiter—or to others—is not a nice person. . . . Watch out for people who have a situational value system, who can turn the charm on and off depending on the status of the person they are interacting with. Be especially wary of those who are rude to people perceived to be in subordinate roles” [like hotel maids, clerks, and checkout people]. The article even tells about one blowhard who wouldn’t speak to the waiter, but told his executive assistant what he wanted to eat, and the assistant would tell the waiter “in a comical three-way display of pomposity.”<sup>1</sup>

I mentioned the article to a preacher colleague. She said that when she was in seminary she helped pay the bills by waiting tables at seminary functions. The worst event to wait tables for, she said, was the meeting of the seminary board, the most important meeting at the seminary. And the worst of the worst was a prominent pastor of a large church who treated the waiters like slaves. She said: “I know his church did a lot of good, but . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Is that what you want on your tombstone? “He did a lot of good, but . . .” The Waiter Test. The Walking Test. It means that you seek to pattern your life like Jesus, and Jesus noticed all kinds of people. If you say you do a lot of good, but put down other people, you deceive yourself. If you say you are an important person, and others are underlings, you are walking in darkness.

Check it out. It’s a good way to take the test. How do you treat people in this world who are below you on the world’s scale of importance—the people who serve you, the people who are supposed to blend in, the people who are supposed to do their jobs without causing a ripple on the surface of your life? And then: How do you suppose Jesus would have treated them? Take the Walking Test with Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> “CEO’s put stock in treatment of waiters as best character test.” *The Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), April 17, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The waiter was Monnie Caine, now pastor at the Normandy, TN, Presbyterian Church. The big city pastor and church shall remain unidentified.

You know how it's possible to identify someone by the way they walk? Even when they're quite a ways away, you can tell who they are by their walk—slew footed or pigeon-toed, striding or mincing, purposeful or ambling. Here's someone to model your walk after: Jesus of Nazareth. "If we abide in him, we ought to walk as he walked."

It's not really a matter of going around announcing to everyone: "I'm a Christian." It is rather a matter of walking and talking and living in such a way that others may look at us and say: "Oh yes, there goes one who is a follower of the Christ."✠