

UNASHAMED OF CHRIST

Intro: Testimony by Kevin and Paula Unbehahn.

Good Morning. For those of you that may not know us, we're the Unbehaun's. This is my wife Paula, our sons Logan and Jonah are sitting over here, and my name is Kevin. We are up here this morning to share our experiences of the impact that Christ and His church can have on a life (or in our case, a family).

We'll begin by recalling our first worship experience here at Trinity. We had been attending a church of another denomination prior to our arrival to Reedsburg in October 2000. Paula was interested in finding a church where we could grow in our faith. I felt that we had been doing this at our previous church, so I was a bit reluctant to walk through the front door for the first time.

As many of you recall, the sanctuary that we sit in today had not yet been built. Corporate worship took place in the area we now refer to as fellowship hall. I recall entering the building on our first Sunday and seeing a pleasant looking couple standing at the entry to the sanctuary handing out bulletins and greeting worshippers. When the man extended his hand to welcome us, he stated "I'm Billy McCullough and this is my wife Shirley...we're glad that you are able to join us today." I remember looking into his eyes and feeling that he actually meant what he said. By the time the worship service started several minutes later, we had 8-10 other people walk up to us and welcome us to Trinity. That welcoming atmosphere was something that I was not accustomed to, but greatly appreciated.

I don't remember the specifics of Pastor's message on that day (I am sure it was good), but I do vividly recall the testimony given by a Sue McCain near the conclusion of the teaching. She spoke of how she had been raised in a religious home; had been baptized as an infant, owned a Bible (that she rarely opened), had been confirmed, and that while growing up certainly knew about the Lord but did not have a personal relationship with Him. She went on to tell of how her life changed when she made the decision to follow Christ. I sat in the chair that morning with a heart full of pride and thought of two things:

1. There is no way that I would ever stand before a group of people to give a testimony in that way.
2. Boy, she must have missed something growing up because she seemed to have the proper upbringing to be a good Christian.

In reality, the story that she shared that day could very easily have been about me. I did not realize it at that exact moment but it was a message that I needed to hear. I am thankful for her willingness to share her experience that morning.

We got through the remainder of the service and at the conclusion I motioned to Paula that we needed to get our stuff picked up. I wanted to get out the door before someone stopped us. We quickly got our things together, got our boys' coats on, and turned to leave...and there they were, standing right in our path to the door...the Rothwell family. They introduced themselves; asked a little about us, toured us through the Sunday school area, and invited us to the adult Small Group that they were attending. I left the building that day telling Paula that this was probably not the place for us—people seemed to be a little too expressive in worship, that I was uncomfortable with the level of transparency, and the service was not structured in the same manner as our previous church. Ironically, these were probably the same reasons that I returned a few weeks later.

Well, Kevin and my reaction to our first visit to Trinity couldn't have been more different. I left that morning full of a joy that I had never experienced before. I just knew that this was God's answer to a

prayer that I had been praying for almost 3 years: to know him and feel his presence more in my life and in the life of my family. I remember getting into the car after church and looking over at Kevin—I could just see he didn't share my enthusiasm. This actually caused quite a bit of friction in our family (especially on Sunday mornings over the next few weeks). I cried out to God—How could You bring us to this awesome church and then Kevin doesn't want to go? I just couldn't understand it. (Little did I know that God was working in me).

Well, one morning after “trying another church” so that we could make a decision based on all the available choices (if you know Kevin well you know that's true) I got so upset I went for a drive to cool down. While I was driving, my thoughts were on a couple we had recently met at Trinity (Phil and Debbie Raupp). Completely out of character, I called them and immediately broke down crying. Of course they told me to come right over. They were so wonderful. They listened, encouraged and even cried with me, and then gave me some of the best advice I've ever received. Be Quiet and Pray. I'm sure that was the lesson that God was trying to teach me. God is in control. That has been and continues to be a very valuable lesson in my life. And it works!!

Kevin and I talked about how we wanted our family to go to church together and he saw how happy going to Trinity made me so he said that he would attend Trinity—not necessarily join, but attend.

At that point it took just a short time for us to realize that people such as the McCulloughs, Rothwells, the McCains and the Raupps were not unique. This church body was full of many, many, people just like them. People who extended Christ's love to others and stepped up to use the gifts that God had blessed them with for His glory. It was something that we wanted to learn more about. During the next several months we participated in CLASS 101 and learned that to publicly profess our faith in Jesus Christ, we should be baptized—a full body immersion baptism. Well, I had some reservation about that. After all, I had been baptized as an infant, and then publicly proclaimed my faith when I was confirmed as an eighth grader. Why did I need to go through another baptism? We had several conversations with Pastor Mike and as well as a few of our new friends who explained how this was an act of obedience, confirming our commitment to follow the teachings of Jesus. What patience they had with me as I worked to rationalize that decision.

God was continuing to grow and change me. I wanted so much for us to be baptized together, but I knew that I needed to wait and be patient.

One Wednesday evening as I was getting the boys ready for kids club (a children's program that Trinity had when we first started coming) out of the blue Kevin told me if I saw Carol Meeks to ask her to put him down on the list of people for the upcoming baptism. It took me totally by surprise—I remember saying Okay, but on the inside I was just rejoicing and praising God.

We were baptized with several others at Lake Redstone during the summer of 2001. It was a wonderful experience for us, one that brought us immediate exuberance in feeling God's love and favor.

At approximately the same time, our Building for Life project was in its construction phase. Just as many of you, we had a chance to work along side several of the teams who traveled here from throughout the Midwest. This again, was another example to me of people graciously offering their time, talents, and gifts to further God's Kingdom. I was moved by the experience and wanted to find out what I could do to serve in a similar way.

This led us to attend CLASS 301 where we learned of ways to apply the spiritual gifts that God had blessed us with. We became involved in a Small Group, and then began serving in a few small ways alongside other members of the body. Each of these experiences, along with those before them, helped to begin shaping us into the people that God is calling us to be. Our lives have changed, all through realizing the grace and love of our Lord. I find myself speaking openly now about my faith to family, friends, and co-workers; I seek God's guidance for our family frequently through prayer; and Paula and I are committed to raising our children in a Godly home.

Time doesn't allow for me to talk about all the ways that belonging to his body of believers has impacted our lives. When we first started attending here we frequently sang a song "I will never be the Same Again". Over the past few months since I found out we would be moving I have often thought of that song. I am so grateful to God for the gift he has given us in this Church. God has used this body to change our lives and we will never be the same again.

At times, it seems like just yesterday that we walked through those doors for the first time. At other times, when we think back on the ways that we have been ministered to by this Church Family during the past 3.5 years, it seems like a lifetime. I felt prior to our move to Reedsburg, that we were being sent here due to my employment. As I look back at it now that was clearly not the case...God brought us here to be cared for and nurtured by a loving body of Christ-followers. We have been blessed more than I ever thought possible through the experience.

Now, we stand before you for the last time as members of this body. We're prepared to make our next move during the upcoming week. This time, however, I realize that it is not my job that is causing us to be relocated, but rather it's the next step in God's plan for our family. We're sad to be leaving, but excited by what God has in store for us and earnestly seek to follow His will.

Pastor Mike:

That day when Kevin and Paula were baptized was a significant day in their life. Not because of the lake or the water or a religious ceremony. It was significant because of what it represented. It was marking all that went on as God gathered together a husband, wife and two boys under the headship of Jesus Christ.

It was marking the submission of two human wills, minds, and souls to life in Christ and in relationship with God. Their baptism did not achieve this for them. It marked it for them. Kevin came out of the water with fists in the air as he celebrated the freedom he felt inside of Him. A freedom of soul a freedom that comes with surrender.

We are a month away from a big day in our church life. The day for our summer baptism service. On this day men, women, and children whom God has called to himself through the Gospel and entrusted to His church will be baptized. Together as a church body we will mark publicly their profession of Christ as Lord of their life and savior of their soul. As they are lowered into the water and raised up from the water they are marking themselves as followers of Christ before God and all who are present.

Some may be like Kevin and say what is the big deal. It's just water. But it is a big deal. Because something happens inside of you when you put yourself on record publicly as a follower of Jesus Christ. It is like a seal that you look back on when Satan calls your faith into question and plants seeds of doubt in your mind about your relationship with God.

What's the big deal about baptism

Christ Accepted the Mark of Baptism Himself.

Matthew 3:13-17 *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and landing on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (NIV)*

This was an incredible event. Here comes the son of God wading down into the water willing to be associated with and identified with an out of favor soon to be beheaded Rabbi and his teaching. And then God in heaven demonstrates his approval of the whole ordeal visibly and audibly. It was an incredible moment that had Heaven's approval written all over it. Jesus was there. The holy spirit was there. And the Father was there.

Christ Marked his Followers with Baptism.

John 3:22 *After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. (NIV)* So those who were joining his movement were identifying themselves with Him through baptism.

So it was that as Jesus went from town to town and place to place, he taught, performed miracles to authenticate his identity as the Messiah and called people to become his followers and then to be baptized to publicly mark their association with Him and with the rest of the Christ-following community.

Well the time came for his earthly ministry to be through and that is when his disciples were given what we know as the Great commission. Herein lies the third thing I want you to notice

Christ Commands the mark of Baptism upon all who follow Christ

Matthew 28:19-20 *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* (NIV)

These are the marching orders of the church my friend. They always will be. So it was from that point forward that the church was to mark the passage of people into the Christ-following community. And by taking this mark they were identifying themselves with Christ.

Conversion and entrance into Christ's faith community is a defining moment in a person's life and Jesus says raise up a marker.

Bottom Line, Baptism is the Public mark of People who become his followers

The tendency/temptation to be a covert or undercover Christian

(The story of Joseph of Arimethia.) Just after Jesus Crucifixion. John 19:38 *"Joseph of Arimethia went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus in order to bury Him. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, because he feared the Jews."*

Let me share with you some things we know about this undercover Christian who came out of the shadows after the death of Jesus. Joseph was a member of a the Sanhedrin, a prestigious judicial body of religious leaders. It was the most powerful group of Jews allowed to operate under the roman rule.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus as his popularity rose among the people this religious body as a whole became jealous, envious, afraid etc and wanting nothing more than to get rid of Jesus. They would send some of their members to go and listen to him in an effort to try to find fault with Him or to try to trap him with some tricky question that they could then use to shut him down or even get him executed.

Well evidently somewhere along the way Joseph was won over by him and became a follower but he kept it to himself because he was afraid. I imagine he was afraid of what might happen or what it might mean for him politically and financially if he lost his position. So he kept secret about it. But something changed when the Sanhedrin jockeyed and canived to get Jesus crucified. I imagine he saw the whole thing and inside it was tearing him up. And when it was all through I imagine there was a fair amount of guilt when he realized this was the Messiah and he was a member of the group that killed him and through his silence he gave tacit approval and was in part directly responsible.

That is a load to carry. But witnessing the death of Jesus, realizing and seeing the courage of Christ. He could no longer hide in the shadows. He could no longer keep his identification with Christ under the radar. And he did the only thing he could do. He went to the office of Pontious pilate and demanded the body of Jesus so he could give him a proper and decent burial. He donated in his own tomb, carried the limp body of Christ from the hill to his own property.

That was a public affirmation if there ever was one. I can only imagine what his fellow Sanhedrin members said and thought when Joseph went on permanent record to have his own tomb be the burial site for the one they had executed. Not a single religious or political leader would have any difficulty interpreting that decision.

But that didn't matter anymore. He moved from fear to faith, from cowardly to courageous. Seeing and realizing the extent to which Jesus was willing to go for him and the courage of Christ. He could not hide any longer. He came out from under the covers. He uncovered his faith. Let me take some time to describe some of the reasons we all need to be open and uncovered Christ-followers.

The Reasons to Be an uncovered Christian

What Christ has done for you can be done for others.

Rom 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."*

There was a time in my life when I was not as open about my faith as I now am. When I was in High School I passed up opportunities to be an uncovered Christian because I was afraid of the reputation affects and how it might change how people viewed me.

I'm much too old to care about that anymore. And I am much too familiar with what life without Christ has become for people and what life in Christ can do for people to be ashamed. And that is what Paul is saying here. The Good news of Jesus Christ isn't something to be ashamed of. It is too helpful and powerful for people to keep it a secret.

That is part of why Jesus gave us baptism. Not just to mark the change for us and to provide a memorable experience for us to look back on as a flag in time when the course of my life changed. But to provide a "going public" ceremony to invite friends to. When they see grown men and women as well as little children get baptized and they hear the stories that are told the holy spirit will start posing penetrating question in their mind and they will not easily walk away unaffected.

I want to take you to a passage that speaks of some of the incredible blessing we have in Christ that people without Him don't have.

1 Peter 1:3-5 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be **born again** . . .*

(made alive. Spiritually dead but now alive in relationship to God. Far from God now intimate with God)

*to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

(those without Christ are without God and without hope in the world eph 2. When a loved one passes they grieve without hope. That's not the case with those who follow Christ. We have hope because of the resurrection. Just as Jesus Christ was raised to life we too shall live eternally with god. We live with the hope of character transformation and the hope that the demise of our bodies gives rise to an eternal home in heaven.)

⁴*to obtain **an inheritance** which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,*

(God among other things has a place prepared for us John 14, we have in waiting a new and glorified body and more. **1 Cor. 2:9** "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--(NIV) Here, our bodies are in decline. Our possessions do not last. But what we have in Christ as our inheritance will last forever and we can not even begin to perceive them with earthly minds. And then note: reserved in heaven for you. It all has your name on it.)

⁵*who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*
(NASB)

And none of what we have in Christ is something that can be taken away or lost. We are kept by God's power. We come to Christ by God's call and mercy to us and are kept by God's power.

What's there to be ashamed of? You have something to offer people. This is why Paul said "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. It is the power of God for salvation to all who believe."

Jesus said this **Matthew 5:14-16** *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵"Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lamp stand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (NASB)*

Baptism is the first step of obedience whereby you bring your light out and set it out to be seen. Following Christ is a life of not just the transformation of our own heart but a life of extending our hand and illuminating the one thing we have to share that can change the course of another person's life and destiny.

To Celebrate God's Grace

God has always wanted his Grace to be celebrated. The keynote celebration of God's people in the OT was Passover. It was a celebration which commemorated the people's deliverance from slavery in Egypt to freedom in relationship to God.

God was about to pour out his wrath on Egypt. It was the 10th and final plague. God was going to send the death angel to sweep through the country and strike dead the first born of every household. But the death angel would pass-over any household which had slaughtered a lamb for the celebration meal and wiped the blood of that lamb over the doorpost of their house.

They had to go public with their willingness to leave Egypt and follow their deliverer out of Egypt. Every year thereafter God's people held a Passover celebration. They held a big party and a special meal which celebrated God's grace in passing over their household when he came in to judge the land and its people.

What the Passover celebration was for the Jewish OT community, the Baptism celebration is to the Christ-following community. It is a time to look back and remember the grace of God that came to us and delivered us from our separation from God and his plan for our lives when our deliverer the second Moses led us into freedom.

It is an event which the whole body needs to be present for, not only to celebrate with those being baptized but to celebrate through remembering and reflection on our own deliverance. We will be having a testimony service, music, food, games, grilling the best stuff we can bring. It will be a festival of Grace. Henceforth this annual celebration shall be called a Festival of Grace.

We are recipients of God's abundant grace. And we are to celebrate that.

Most of the world thinks God is a mean, angry ogre. We need to celebrate what he has done and remember. The world needs to see that we are a grace-filled people who follow a grace filled savior and have a relationship with a grace filled God. So bring your friends, neighbors, your family members let's do this together. This is the big event of our summer. Let's do it and do it up right.

Conclusion:

A word for those without Christ: Some of you who are hear today may well be ready to become a Christ-follower today. Maybe like Kevin and many others you've had enough religion and its time to step into a relationship with God and become a real Christ follower. (Prayer)

Slide Show: Before I conclude my message let's take a look at a stream of pictures of people who have been baptized in recent years and I want you to just imagine what the father is doing as these people publicly identify themselves with his son. Remember how he showed up and approved his own son's baptism. (Slideshow and music)

A word for those who need to be Baptized: So what about you. Some of you have come to faith in Christ in the last several months. Some of you perhaps turned the corner a long time ago but have never marked it. If you are having difficulty with making your identification with Christ public I want to say a few things to you. If you think you more or less identify with Joseph's undercover days when he just preferred to keep things silent and personal. Let me remind you of some things.

Jesus Christ stepped out of the shadows and safety of the carpentry shop and the security of a weekly paycheck, and the comfort of everyone considering one of the good ole boys. And he identified himself as the long awaited Messiah, took unbelievable amounts of heat and criticism for the three years of public ministry, and died a humiliating death. And he did it to procure your salvation.

What I'm saying is that one whose name you bear, who delivered unto you a salvation like I described earlier displayed and unbelievable amount of courage at every step to call you to himself. And there was nothing low key or private about the very public, very painful, humiliating death that your savior had endured to redeem you.

And I remind you that the mark of baptism that we will celebrate next month doesn't involve nails, crowns of thorns, flogging, humiliation, in front of a hostile blood thirsty mob. It only really requires a few hours of your time, maybe a few written or spoken words of testimony to be shared, and a quick immersion into a clean pool of heated water while you're surrounded by friends who love and care for you. And this in front of a friendly group of people that offer a standing ovation at the end.

One day you will stand before the one who went to the cross. You will see the hands with holes in them. You will know you are there because of his courage and his love for you. And what will you say when you give an account for not being willing to do such a simple thing he asked of you?

Uh? Well I felt it was a little juvenile. Uh??? I would have had to try to explain this to my family. I lived in a small town and it probably would have gotten around at work and well I just didn't have the courage or see why it was necessary. I don't want to even think how the rest of that conversation would go.

I think Jesus is looking for people who respond more like this. Christ, you went to the limit for me. Where's the water I want do this as soon as possible and then after that, Lord what's next. Just say the word. Just say the word. What ever you ask me to do, what ever your word calls for from. I'll do it.

Friends I am calling you to step forward and publicly receive this mark and allow us to celebrate it with you. But today is the day to decide. It's time my friend.