

## “Today is the Day”

**Date:** January 21, 2018      **Place:** Lakewood UMC      **Texts:** Exodus 8:1-15; John 5:1-9      **Occasion:** Unashamed, series      **Themes:** Choices, Decisions, Healing

Shame happens when we confuse our “who” with our “do.” Guilt is when we feel bad about something we have done; shame is when we feel bad about who we are. Shame makes us feel less than, not enough, inadequate. Shame keeps us from being all that we can be.

When I was a young boy, I remember my mother telling me, “We Lewis’s can’t sing. We just sound terrible.” I internalized that belief and held onto it for years. I was afraid to sing; I mumbled the words in church. I didn’t want to sound awful and ruin the music that other people were enjoying. It went like that for years.

That is until a choir director in one of my churches asked me why I didn’t sing with the choir, that I had a pleasant voice. I told her what my mother had said, and she laughed. She said to me, “You’ve got a nice voice. I think your mother was talking about herself.”

Guess what, I’ve enjoyed singing ever since. I’ll never win a contest for my voice, but I’m not ashamed of it anymore. Shame was holding me back, in this area of my life. Shame does that to us, tells us we can’t do something, that we’re not good enough. How has shame held you back?

Shame comes in big sizes and little sizes. Maybe my illustration with singing seems small and petty. But shame can paralyze a person. If we’ve been made to feel that we’re not worthy of love, that somehow we’re inadequate as a person, shame can keep us from experiencing love.

When I was six years old, my Dad got a new job and our family moved from Charlottesville, Virginia to Baltimore, Maryland. I had grown up in Virginia. I had a southern accent when I moved north. The kids in

school made fun of me. I had a hard time making friends, for a number of years. In my little head, somehow I internalized that I wasn't like the other kids, that somehow I wasn't good enough. I didn't trust other people because I was afraid they would hurt me. And I held them at arm's length.

It took me a long time to overcome those feelings of not being enough, of not being worthy. It took me a long time to learn to trust that all people aren't mean.

For the longest time, I never allowed myself to get my hopes up, because I didn't want to be disappointed. Shame will do that to a person; it will steal your joy. Shame makes us settle for less than we deserve. It can make you settle for what's bearable, instead of what God's best is.

Shame can cause people to get involved in destructive tendencies – abusing drugs or alcohol, getting involved in damaging relationships, engaging in self-harming behaviors and developing eating disorders. Many people turn to food to medicate their shame.

Shame robs us of the abundant, purpose-driven, passionate life that Jesus has planned for us. And so the question I have is, how long will we hold on to the shame before we decide to let it go? How long will we stay stuck in what was? How long will we accept what is, instead of what could be? We continue to stay stuck, until we make a decision.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 says, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God." One of the greatest gifts that God has given to us human beings is the gift of choice, of being able to make decisions. How long will you choose to allow shame to rule your life?

In one of the most fascinating passages of scripture, Moses gives Pharaoh the choice of when he will end the plague of the frogs. There are

frogs everywhere, and Moses can put an end to the curse. He tells Pharaoh, “you tell me when, and it will be done.” Here’s what’s fascinating, Pharaoh answered, “tomorrow.” He could have ended the plague that very day, but instead he said “tomorrow.”

Lots of people postpone their healing; they put it off; they procrastinate. For some, they have simply gotten used to the way things are. For some, they fear the pain that might be involved. If someone is told they have cancer, they might fear the pain of the treatment. If someone has a heart issue, he or she may fear the pain of surgery, so they put it off.

The same is true with shame. We may fear the pain of opening up an old wound and looking at it again. We may fear letting go of what we know for the fear of possibly being hurt again.

If we have been shamed in some area of our life, we may fear getting hurt again, so we avoid those situations. But not dealing with it can do harm to our relationships, our family, and even our own personal fulfillment of God’s plan for our life.

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus meets a man who has been sitting at the pool of Bethesda, where people receive healing in the waters. He’s been there for 38 years, an invalid unable to get into the waters to be healed. Thirty eight years is a long time to sit by the waters, hoping to be healed.

Do you remember the question Jesus asked him? He asked him, “Do you want to be healed?” Maybe Jesus was testing the man’s faith. But maybe Jesus simply wanted to know, “Do you want to be well? Are you ready to have your life changed? Are you ready to leave the past and begin a new life?” Jesus gave the man a choice.

We all have choices. We can choose to stay with the pain that is familiar, or we can risk the pain of bringing it out in to the light, in order to be healed. We can't change the past, but we can make some new choices that will change the future. How long will we allow shame to dominate our thoughts, and cause us to experience less than what God wants for us?

Why stay with the misery one more day? Why not be done with it today? At some point we need to be able to say, "Today is the day. I'm not going to put it off any longer. Not tomorrow, but today. I'm going to face that pain so I can move beyond it. Today I'm going to let Jesus heal me. Today I'm going to face my shame so I can move beyond it."

Imagine you were to meet Jesus face-to-face today, and he asked you, "Do you want to be healed from your shame?" What would you say to Jesus? Are you ready to say yes? Sometimes the familiar pain we experience due to our shame can seem safe and tame, compared to the unknown journey we may have to walk to overcome our shame.

Jesus has set every one of us free. But it's up to us to decide to walk in that freedom. One of the best ways to overcome shame is to look closely at the consequences of letting shame remain in our hearts. So think about these questions:

- How has shame kept you from fully experiencing God's love?
- How has shame hindered you from receiving and embracing love from other people?
- How has shame gotten in the way of you loving other people with freedom and passion?
- How has shame limited your capacity to experience and live in joy?

My friends, we can't change the past, but we can make some decisions today that will change the future. We can be paralyzed by something that happened last week, last month, last year, or 50 years ago. Or we can allow Jesus to break the chains and set us free.

Your shame is not too big for Jesus. Jesus shamed our shame on the cross at Calvary. Jesus overcame the shame of the world, and he can give us the victory as well. So we need to change our perspective. We need to continuously look at things through God's eyes – through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ living on the inside of each one of us.

Shame is not what God has in store for any one of us. God wants to remove it, but God will not take it away without our permission. Just as Jesus asked the man at the pool of Bethesda, God asks us, "Do you want to be healed of your shame?"

Jesus bore my shame when he was nailed to the cross. Today he is fighting for me and for you from a place of victory.

Today we have a choice. We can stay stuck in our shame. Or we can stand up and make new choices to move towards a new future. It can feel risky, but God promises to be with us every step of the way.

God loves each one of us unconditionally. God is just waiting to set you free from all shame, because there are even more people who need to hear about your freedom. So, put your eyes on the future and get moving. Choices really do determine destiny, and God has given you the power to choose! Amen!

This sermon borrows heavily from the book and workbook entitled *Unashamed* by Christine Caine, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press, 2016, pp. 81-100; workbook pp. 33-42.