

Failure

I don't know if you have ever been desperate for a job, knowing that without one there might be a greater chance of personal disaster. I found myself in such a position when I returned to Chicago after finishing college. I was a few months away from my marriage to Carol and she was still in school. I knew that I needed to get a job or things were going to get quite hairy for me quite quickly.

I was a bit desperate and crashed on the couch for a short time of some friends who had also graduated from College. Jesse, Phil, and Tom. Jesse is one of my best friends, Phil was on my dorm floor at school, and I did not really know Tom well. Theirs was a second-floor walk-up right off the infamous Rush Street. This was a neighborhood on the edge of the wealthy Gold Coast.

This neighborhood was an area of parking lots, restaurants, and seedy bars. College students, tourists, and military on leave populated these establishments in a steady stream of people. It appeared that their apartment was over one of the very few neighborhood bars in that area, The Underground Wonder Bar.

Every night at 3 am (Chicago's closing time) a woman I assumed was an employee ushered in last call by singing a horrendous version of Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" to get the drunk patrons out the door. All of this happened below me, outside the front window abutting the couch in which I slept.

So, I was over the moon when I found a new Job at the neighborhood grocery store, Potash Brothers. Carol and I soon found a studio apartment for me and we got excited about our upcoming marriage in January. I quickly moved

from bagging groceries, to driving a delivery truck, and then to the coveted cashier job. I was a good employee. I even won a television as employee of the month.

The work was hard, but I enjoyed it. Yet, after being there for a while I noticed the concern that came from a few people around me. Carol and Jesse started to challenge my attitude. I was shocked. They relayed that my jokes about my Jewish employer were completely inappropriate and they did not find them funny.

I was only joking! What was the harm!? I did my work, and if I wanted to blow off steam who were they to lecture me?

When one of them, lovingly, said, “Brian, I think you are anti-Semitic” I couldn’t believe it. I was upset. I was a Christian, I believed in Jesus, a Jew after all. Yet, their challenges stuck with me and irritated my hardened heart.

I was encouraged to read some Jewish literature. I remember it like it was yesterday sitting on Oak Street Beach with my back against a “No Diving” sign. I had just finished Elie **Wiesel’s** short fiction “Night” about the Holocaust. As I stared out over Lake Michigan I cried deeply. I knew I needed change. I could no longer ignore the depths of my own prejudices. Racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism ran deep, and they were buttressed by the churches I attended. I knew that moment that things needed to change, that I didn’t want any longer to perpetuate harm against others, intentionally or part of the systems I associated with.

“If it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and classism must die in the church for growth to happen. We can get our hackles up. We can live

in denial and say that these are not a part of our systems. Or we can stamp our feet, refusing to change. All of these choices are not choices toward resurrection.

If we do not move with the Spirit, the Spirit will find other places to nest. It is a fundamental contradiction of faith to say we believe in a God who shows no partiality, and then buttress up partiality in our worshipping communities. In a denomination that is over 90% Caucasian it is impossible for us to deny our own history.

Our denomination looks good on paper. We absolutely reject inequality of women in statement after statement, but still hire women minister at a discount price. We make national statements against racism, but flinch at talking about real and substantive efforts to bring about reconciliation between different ethnicities (Not to mention the push back clergy get from laity when they affirm that

Black Lives Matter). We say that we affirm people of different levels of mobility, but many of our churches don't even have accessible bathrooms or entryways. Nationally we have always affirmed a non-discrimination policy with the LGBTQIA faithful, but the reality of their full inclusion is met often with a silent pact to not make conservatives in our denomination angry and leave.

I bring this up, not because I want to condemn, but because I want to see our denomination and this church reach the fullness of its potential in its faith toward Jesus Christ. Grace is always expanding. If it were not then Jonah would never have left for Nineveh, Jesus would have never healed the woman with an issuance of blood, Philip would have never baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch, and Peter would have never witnessed to the leather worker. I also bring it up because I have been transformed by the renewing of my own mind from the limits that

culture has given me to crave freedom for all people.

This does not mean that we will ever get to the point where we are completely free in this world of our prejudices. Yet, God is above all of those. While our view is limited, God's is unlimited. We have a savior that lets us know that he is not willing that any should perish. How can we then bring hate here? We must accept those who the world, our culture, our upbringing, or our region finds unacceptable. If we don't then what chance do we have at seeing Jesus Christ in the world?