

The Easy Life of a Jesus Fan – Luke 9: 28-36  
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The central character of the Gospels is Jesus, of course, but the most important people of the Gospels are his disciples! Without his disciples, there is no Christianity. There is no Church. There is no story. There is no memory of Jesus, what he said, what he did, how he lived or how he died. Without the disciples, we would not be who we are, Christians. The disciples are the most important people of both the Gospels and to Jesus!

I have been confronted with some opinions about Christianity recently that have caused me to choose whether or not I wanted to agree or disagree. Sometimes it is easier to smile and have no position at all. Among the opinions that I heard is the importance of electronic media for the future of the Church, and I have some contrary opinions about its importance. Also, someone from another congregation asked me the question “do you listen to Christian music?” The truth is I enjoy many different types of music. I even listen to bluegrass music - and it took a long time for me to stop squirming at the unusual sounds of that music - but do I listen to Christian music? NO!

I suppose I am becoming less sensitive to offending good Christian people at this time in my life. To be a bit more unorthodox, I think some good Christian folks need to be offended a bit more. I find I am moving away from politically correct responses to such questions. My answer was “NO, I don’t listen to that stuff, and I don’t find it particularly helpful or interesting. I’m not even sure that most of it has anything to do with anything Jesus had a lot to do with.” Now that I have offended just about every technocratic contemporary Christian, I will explain.

I have two definitions of contemporary Christian music

1. Seven-Eleven music. That is seven words repeated eleven times. (I heard that one from someone else)
2. Yea Jesus music, and that is my original.

When I arrived at the church in Hawaii, one of their four worship services was the Contemporary service. Much of it was good, such as the 11:30 start time, which seemed to be meeting the needs of lots of younger people. It was informal, and held in the fellowship hall and I liked that. They had a band with drums, guitars and other instruments and I liked that. That was all good but the part that nearly caused me to implode was the music. It was nothing more than “YEA JESUS!” It was something I hoped to improve upon during my time there.

When I was at Boise some folks wanted to start a contemporary worship. It was a good idea whose time had come and we began it. I had one condition – find contemporary music that says something of importance, certainly something that says more than “YEA JESUS”, and the folks that developed the service did that.

Today is when the Church observes the transfiguration of Jesus – that being when Jesus climbed the mountain with three of his disciples; Peter, James, and John, and the Gospel tells us that Moses and Elijah appeared to them and the voice of God spoke. The three disciples had no idea what to do, but then said “it is good for us to be here,” and then they decided to become sideline people, kind of like cheerleaders or even fans. That was the kind of guy Peter was, he would rarely think before speaking

- The former son-in-law of a member of the congregation was always giving his opinion about something. Most often people simply shook their heads and responded “that’s Bill.” His former father-in-law leaned over to me and said, “that’s my former son-in-law, he always says what he thinks, but he always does it without thinking.”

Peter did not make God happy, because we are told the voice of God came down heavy on them and in essence said, “shape-up you fools, you were not brought here to be taught how to be a better fan or cheerleader. I don’t need you to build a stadium. You were brought here to become aware of how important and necessary you are for the future. You were brought here to learn that you are to be players, not fans.”

Therein is what I perceive as the challenge that needs to confront everyone who calls him or her self, “Christian.” Are you a fan or are you a disciple?

Much of the movement I see gaining strength in the church of today is that we are too heavily invested in fan development than disciple development.

- Fans are the people who cheered Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey – “Jesus, Jesus, you’re our man. If you can’t do it, no one can.”
- Fans are the people who gathered around to see him perform another incredible miracle – “Jesus, Jesus, you’re our man...”
- Fans are the people who lined the side of the road in Jerusalem as Jesus carried a cross on his back on the way to Golgotha. Fans are the people who chant the cheer “Jesus, Jesus, you’re our man, if you can’t do it, no one can,” and they are everywhere!

Jesus stands on the mountain before God, in front of his disciples and lo; his disciples become a cheering section – they want to build a stadium! That is when God unloads on them: “What are you doing? I don’t need cheerleaders or fans or a bigger stadium. I don’t need anyone to stand off on the sidelines and hope for him to have victory; I have greater needs of you than being a cheering fan.”

So Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, and leaves Jerusalem carrying a cross to the cheers of fans who yell “Jesus, Jesus, you’re our man. If you can’t do it, no one can.” Jesus says to each one of the fans: “Go get your cross and join me.” And the fans say “You want me to do what? I don’t think you understand, Jesus, I am here to cheer you on, I believe you can do it. I am not here to risk getting myself hurt on the field. I am here to watch you take the beating. I am here to watch you do it so I can have bragging rights and let everyone know that I am a supporter of the winning team. No Jesus, this cross stuff is your stuff, not mine. I am into being a super fan, not a player.”

The Church must get out of the fan development business! Real Christianity is not about praise and adoration! It isn’t about placing a photo of the greatest player of all time

above the fireplace. The gospel tells us that when Jesus left the mountain he immediately led the disciples out of the stands and onto the field.

- He took them into the middle of the mud and the grime.
- He took them to the hurting and broken people outside the stadium.
- He took them to the helpless, hopeless and voiceless people of the day who had no idea there was a game.
- He took them to the invisible people that others ignored and avoided because they could not afford to get in.
- He took them to the outcasts and those declared unclean, and said to the disciples; “Here is the game, here is where you get into the mud and grime. Here is where you get bruised, cut and maybe even killed. Here is where you are going to experience the disapproval, hate, and wrath of the many who would never approve of such involvement. Here is where you speak to the people in power and of influence who others fear and avoid. Here is where you confront them with their blindness and uncaring ways toward the people that God cares for and loves. Here is where you place your life and hope, and here is where you will find your cross. Peter, James and John, all you want to be are super fans, and all I want from you is your life. Are you up to it?”

God does not need fans because, win or lose, fans just wipe their mouths after a good cold one then go home to a hot meal and a warm bed. Fans chant “Jesus, Jesus, you’re our man, if you can’t do it, no one can.” But when Jesus says “It is your turn to get dirty, cut and hurt,” then how often Jesus must hear “Oh, you don’t understand, I am not here to play, I bought a ticket, I am a fan here to cheer. But I am glad that you carry a cross, Jesus.”

There rests the gigantic problem the Church faces today, in my opinion. We have many people who want to be a supportive and loyal fan, and not too many who want to be disciples. The challenge of the Church is not to find better ways to meet the worship expectations that will draw the people in and make them into great fans. The challenge of the Church is to find a way to draw some of those loyal fans onto the field, and to get

them to say “yes” to getting muddy, hurt or even killed. That is the difference between a Christian fan and a Christian disciple.

I suspect it is true that there will always be more fans than disciples, but then again perhaps that is all it takes. Perhaps it only takes a few people to make right the ways of wrong, or to bring peace where there is none. Yes, the Gospel story is not only about Jesus, it is equally about us, the people who decide it is time to go to Jerusalem for the purpose of finding our cross. People who decide it is time to go to the stadium but not to sit in the stands and cheer and be a super fan, but to get into the game and risk it all. That is all we are being asked for, it really is. We are being asked to risk it all. That is what Jesus did and his instructions were, after all, “follow me.” Anyone ready to play?

Amen.