

School teachers once again this week placed themselves in harm's way to protect the children under their care. We've seen it all too often in places like Sandy Hook Elementary School and this week in Moore, OK.

Most of us will never find ourselves in a situation where we will be forced to make the often split-second decision to put ourselves between danger and the vulnerable we seek to protect. But, if you are like me, you hope that if you ever found yourself in that position you would act selflessly for the benefit of others.

As I think about that I recall a friend in seminary who 27 years ago turned the wheel of his car to absorb the full impact of a truck loaded with stone that was suddenly in their lane of travel. He acted in a split second to save the life of his wife and infant daughter. Tom would spend months recovering physically; but the lasting impact would leave him with far more debilitating effects.

I often wonder if I would act as selflessly given the same circumstances.

On this Memorial Day weekend we honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving our country. There are countless stories from wars long ago and more recent conflicts that demonstrate the selflessness of service men and women who gave their life for others.

We've even immortalized that selfless attitude in the song, *America the Beautiful*. The second stanza says:

O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife,  
who more than self their country loved...

Who more than *self* their country loved...

Selflessness, self-sacrifice, is a virtue that we hold up as a goal for how we want to live our lives. Chances are if I asked you to rank yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the most selfless, I imagine that most of us would give ourselves a 7 or 8, after all we like to think of ourselves as humble, not just selfless!

But I wonder if that selflessness pervades every part of our life? After all, when it comes to our families we are probably very selfless; but I wonder if that plays out in all areas of our life – like how we approach our faith.

When it comes to our faith I'm sure that most of us would believe that we are selfless; after all isn't that what Jesus demonstrated in his life? But there are some who would challenge our assumption that we are selfless when it comes to our faith. They have even created a term to describe the *selfish*, not *selfless*, attitude that has somehow found its way into the church and into the lives of Christians. That term is 'consumer-Christian.'

And whether we realize it or not, we've all found ourselves at times slipping into the dangerous lifestyle of consumer-Christians.

Before I define that term I want to tie this concept back into what Adam talked about last Sunday. If you weren't here, I'd encourage you to check out the entire message online.

What Adam challenged us to think about is whether or not we've slipped from being the movement that Jesus created, that purposeful gathering of disciples (an *ekklesia*); into a meeting (a *kirke*) a building, or a museum.

You see, I believe that one of the things that determine whether we remain a *movement* or devolve into a *meeting* is whether or not we avoid the pitfall of becoming 'consumer-Christians.'

So what is a Consumer-Christian? A consumer-Christian can simply be defined by the question, **"What's in it for me?"**

Consumer-Christians meet together on Sunday morning to *get* something from the dance that is performed by those appearing on the stage. Like people watching a movie, consumer-Christians sit back waiting to be wowed by the music or inspired by the message. If they personally don't get something out of it they walk out giving it two thumbs down.

Consumer-Christians expect to get something out of their faith without putting anything into it. That's why they can be so easily defined by the question, **"What's in it for me?"**

That's pretty much how we got from being the *movement* that Jesus inspired, that purposeful gathering of disciples who turned the world upside down; into a *meeting* that occupies a building on Sunday morning.

Jesus was well acquainted with the consumer mindset even while he lived. Some, who followed from a distance, followed Jesus because of what they were able to get for themselves.

Mark recorded the events associated with Jesus life and ministry. In Mark 8, which is where we are going to turn in a minute, there is an account of Jesus feeding a large crowd. This is the second, and less familiar account of Jesus feeding a large crowd. The first account, the feeding of the 5,000, is recorded in Mark 6.

Now if someone feeds 5,000 men, plus women and children, with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish; you can be assured that word is going to get around. After all, if Jesus is offering bread without cost to hungry people, healing people of all sorts of diseases and forming an ever-growing, ever-expanding fan-base; chances are good that you want to be around to get something for yourself. Something free!

Now Mark makes a very important note in verse 8; 'The people ate and were satisfied.' Their stomachs were full and as a result they were happy.

Satisfying human hunger is a great way to garner favor among people. And having your hunger satisfied once, you are prone to return to the place where you got your fill the first time.

So long as Jesus was willingly offering free food, the crowds were going to keep growing, keep following.

That's the consumer mindset. So long as you keep feeding me, so long as I'm satisfied; I'll stay loyal, I'll keep following- after all, it's all about me anyway.

That happens with the products we purchase. So long as the product we use keeps making us happy, we'll continue to buy it. But when it doesn't satisfy us...

Most of you are old enough to remember New Coke. If you don't, be thankful. In 1985, Coke introduced New Coke, eliminating the taste that had made it an American icon around the world. Most people hated it! It only took a few short months for the execs at Coke to realize their mistake and re-introduce Coke Classic.

For the American consumer, it's all about me! Whether we're talking soda or any other product we consume; we want what we want!

But consumer-Christians are not just those who follow Jesus from a distance; they are sometimes his closest friends.

Later on in Mark 8 Jesus is discussing with the disciples who they believe he is. They told him that some thought he was John the Baptist, others Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets. (8:28)

But Jesus got up in their face and asked them point blank, 'Who do you say I am?' (8:29) That's when Peter boldly proclaims, 'You are the Messiah!'

Now let's be sure we understand what Peter was saying here. There were many messiahs in the history of Israel. They were revolutionaries who talked of overthrowing the Romans who ruled the nation of Israel. These were leaders who promised to bring a new order to life in Israel.

And if Jesus was *THE* Messiah, then Peter and the other disciples were going to rise to the top along with Jesus. But that is where Peter's dream of something good for him ran head first into Jesus reality.

Mark says that at that moment Jesus began to teach the disciples that He was going to suffer and die. Do you see where this is going? Peter realizes that his boat is rising or falling with Jesus. And if Jesus is suddenly talking death, then Peter doesn't want anything to do with that.

Peter was at that moment a consumer. And what Jesus was selling didn't sound appealing!

So Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. Which leads Jesus to rebuke Peter with those words; 'Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.' (selfish concerns)

Peter had to come to grips with his consumer mindset verses the mindset that Jesus was about to lay out for his disciples and the crowd.

Now pay careful attention to Jesus words in verse 34: *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

Denial. Cross. Those were words of sacrifice and death; not self-centered consumerism.

Suddenly Peter, the other disciples, and the crowd were confronted with the reality that following Jesus wasn't going to be about them *getting* what they wanted; it was going to cost them something; maybe even their lives.

In today's culture of consumerism, denial is not a virtue that is held up. Denial is the opposite; denial is not getting what I want, but giving up what I want for something greater.

Jesus tells us what that something greater is in verse 36, 'What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?' We may satisfy all our wants with what the world has to offer (consumerism), but what will we lose in the process?

We will lose our ability to love and honor others above ourselves? We will miss the opportunity to serve others without asking what we get in return. We will miss the opportunity to give extravagantly so that the physical needs of others are met. We will miss the opportunity to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

We lose all that and more when we ask first, "What's in it for me?"

So let me tell you how we get the opportunity to love and honor others, to serve others, to give extravagantly and to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We need to ask ourselves, "What do others need *from me*?"

Being a disciple of Jesus, being part of the purposeful gathering of disciples, the *ekklesia*, the movement which Jesus intended to use to turn the world upside down; it all begins with us being willing to embrace Jesus call to *deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him*.

The power of the early disciples, the great movements of God in our world, our ability to impact our community, to change lives; it all comes from disciples who are willing to say: "What do others need *from me*?"

They need you and I to lay down our wants and needs so that they can have hope, so that they can experience the power of God to change their lives, so that they can experience the love of God by our demonstration that we have experienced the love of God.

As we pause this Veteran's Day to remember those who gave their lives; as we remember the Moore, OK teacher's selfless acts; may each of us choose to live as disciples of Jesus who ask each day: What do others need from me?