

# Orthodoxy is not a matter of opinion

**By Jaynan Clark, WordAlone Ministries – JUNE 2010**

In this “new day” of WordAlone Network, now Ministries, in which we have committed ourselves to preaching, teaching and confessing Jesus Christ as God’s Word for us and for our salvation through faithful services and resources, the promise to engage in the faithful transition of churches, families, groups and individuals out of the ELCA has brought many to our doorstep.

Over and over again the phone rings and the emails pop up onto the screen from pastors, lay folks, concerned Christians, church presidents ... then my ears are filled with stories until my head spins and my stomach feels sick. Stories of the abuse of power and sinful tactics used to scare or remove pastors and silence outspoken people in the pews.

Always they say they called me because I have such conviction and speak the truth no matter what the cost. I am left to set them straight about me. I’m no hero, certainly not today’s Joan of Arc nor am I the opposite—the “devil woman”—as I’ve been called.

I don’t have any special God given conviction of faith or extra dose of courage. I do, however, as a matter of fact, have an abnormally large spine. Perhaps the two extra vertebrae in my back have served in two ways: as the thorn in my flesh that reminds me daily what a real pain in the rear is, which these days serves me well comparatively speaking, and somehow that freakish long spine provides me extra structural assistance to stand tall.

Perhaps.

And perhaps it is a very good thing that when folks call me I remind them that one reason I wear boots is because it is getting very deep out here and the risk is high as sinners are being led astray and left to doubt not only the earthly church and its leaders, but the very Word of God, its authority and its truth.

So while I love to joke and make people laugh, this is no laughing matter.

People of God, sheep of His flock, sinners of His own redeeming, remember your confession of faith and recite it loudly. Your faith is not personal fortitude or courage or having a spine in times of trial.

Faith is a gift that reminds you daily of who you are as a sinner in need of repentance, asks and receives continuous forgiveness and life in Him. The orthodox Christian faith is not your opinion so do not defend it as such.

As much as you don’t own Jesus but Jesus owns you, the story long told and the faith forever preached, taught and confessed is not your opinion open to change and revision. Your responsibility is not to defend the faith wondering if you are right or not, but to tell Jesus’ story from Genesis to Revelation, from the manger to the tomb, and let Him take it from there.

With all the refuse out there being passed off as the faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ, remember that when Jesus died on the cross, left the tomb empty, destroyed the eternal bonds of death and the devil, He did so in order for you to preach, teach and confess Him as truth, life and salvation. He did not go through death and hell in order for you to:

- Get in touch with yourself.
- Find your identity in yourself.
- Be a better person so others will respect and love you.

- Be ashamed of His name, afraid to tell His story and embarrassed to stand up for Him alone.
- Be convinced that you are great just the way you are.
- Be tolerated, accepted and welcomed and be tolerant, accepting and welcoming of others.
- Become one of the many “church people” who think faith is attendance, obligatory giving, property management, institutional loyalty and a social club that when scratched is shallow and when challenged shoots the wounded and victimizes the victims.
- Believe that life should be fun, fair and “free” for you and yours.
- Continue to vote for Barabbas.
- Convince others that the Word-so dear to Jesus himself -- that He appealed to it throughout His ministry, and temptations with satan ---does not apply today and doesn't fully understand our current context and situations.
- Divert your eyes, your ears, your attention, and your lives from His story to your own.
- Enjoy unrestricted self expression.
- Establish an entire “church” to prop up your own lifestyle choices and match its direction with the society and culture of the time.
- Guide and instruct you in political activism and better development programs so as to substitute your work for His mission.
- Live your life for your own pleasure, fulfillment or anything else that elevates self and sinner above your savior and your total need for Him to save you from yourself.
- Motivate yourself and others to live life to its fullness, go for the gusto and live it up -- however that pleasures and satisfies you.
- Organize religion in His name that continues to work in opposition to Him and His kingdom.
- Secure your political rights or deliver earthly justice and swap preaching, teaching and confessing for social activism.
- Un-sin sin and rob sinners of life changing repentance and forgiveness.
- Use his Holy Name as a shroud over your selfish works and attempts at personal power.

***Jesus, when He walked this earth, didn't much like church people who pretended to be doing God's work when God had long been replaced by their own gods of self, power, privilege, greed and popularity.***

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There are many, many church people I don't like very much. I've learned the hard way at an age much older than my children and others, that when the bottom drops out you find out who your friends are and they are not who you expected them to be, and they are few and far between.

However, according to God's grace and provision, they are followers of Jesus Christ, not first and foremost members of a human institutional church body.

For a preacher my age, this moment of truth was true grace and an encounter with the day-by-day reality of the theology of the cross.

All the pretending and positioning and pleasing become apparent even in my own ministry when I didn't believe I was engaging in it at all.

I was faced with the fact that over 25 years of service in churches from Tanzania to Iowa to Hawaii to Idaho to Washington, there had been countless times that my Lord had called on me to stand up and be counted, but I bowed my head in prayer counting the number of steps to the exit and asking that this cup be taken from me.

Every time that cup was removed and the time passed, I knew what it felt like to be a pious people pleaser and not an obedient follower of the Crucified One. I felt the warmth of the fire on my face as I warmed my hands, head bowed next to Peter himself.

Not again--- for I live with Peter and all the other disciples before me on the other side of the cross, the empty tomb and the promise.

“Church” doesn't mean that much to me ... only the true church, hidden and revealed, that is realized when the Word of God is preached and the sacraments administered rightly.

Church bodies don't mean much, but the Good Shepherd means everything and tending His flock is not a request but a mandate—one sheep at a time.

To do so is not a “good work” nor is it an option or choice.

*It is our calling as His followers.*

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His sheep are being led astray in droves by wolves and hirelings who don't know or won't acknowledge that they are acting the part. But to you who know it is not on your opinion or any person's opinion that you stand, remain unyielding under the eternal Word of God.

The sharp edge of the rock of your confession lies under your bended knees as a painful reminder of your firm foundation when all else is sinking sand.