

Compass Bearing #29
Devotions to Navigate the Coronavirus Pandemic
"Closet Christians" by Pastor Mark Ellcessor
Thursday, May 28, 2020

After Jesus was crucified on the cross, a man named Joseph from the town of Arimathea came forward and got permission to bury the body. Who was this man named Joseph? The four gospels give us quite a bit of information in a few verses (see Matt 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51; John 19:38).

- He was a good man
- He was an upright man
- He was a rich man
- He was a prominent member of the Jewish Ruling Council
- He was waiting for the kingdom of God
- He had become a disciple of Jesus
- He kept his faith in Jesus a secret out of fear

It's this last bullet point that is the limiter on all that Joseph could have done for God. Being good, upright, rich, prominent, anticipatory, and converted were virtually worthless... all because he kept his faith a secret. His fears of ridicule and ostracism kept his feet from following and his mouth from voicing his allegiance to Jesus. So, he remained a secret disciple until Jesus was dead.

Envision how God could have used Joseph of Arimathea if he had proclaimed his faith boldly. Take a look at his résumé again, this time with an imagined twist:

- He was a good man, and a dedicated disciple of Jesus
- He was an upright man, and a dedicated disciple of Jesus
- He was a rich man, and a dedicated disciple of Jesus
- He was a prominent member of the Jewish Ruling Council, and a dedicated disciple of Jesus
- He was waiting for the kingdom of God, and a dedicated disciple of Jesus
- He had become a disciple of Jesus, and never kept it a secret from anybody!

Everybody has a floor and a ceiling. The floor is your starting point, made up of all the blessings, resources, and characteristics you have accumulated up to that moment. The ceiling is your ending point, the highest you can go, the farthest you can jump. Often the ceiling is self-constructed; we limit what we can do for God due to self-imposed restraints. Maybe you've heard of a few of these:

- I can't read my Bible in the break room
- I can't share my faith at work
- I can't talk about Jesus at school
- I can't invite friends to church
- I can't talk about God to strangers
- I can't force my kids to discuss faith
- I can't bring up religion at family gatherings
- I can't pray out loud in public
- I can't do anything about justice issues

Ceilings, ceilings, ceilings. Fear, fear, fear. Many of us are like Joseph of Arimathea who "was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared..." (John 19:38). Now, envision how God can use you if you came out of hiding and boldly proclaimed and practiced your faith in Jesus.

Let's put it another way. What do you think that Jesus wants to see done in the break room, at work and school, among friends and strangers, with your kids and extended family, in public and in a very broken and desperate world? Well, here is the answer, straight from the lips of Jesus:

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16)