

Some of those who have publicly rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ in western history might be classified as his cultured despisers. People like Karl Marx or Frederic Nietzsche, people of learning and with a great capacity for deep critical thinking, whose other ideas have proven to be of world-historical importance. Some of these critics would tell you they are simply too advanced to accept the tenets of the Gospel; that Jesus is the son of God, that his death is salvation, that he was raised to extend eternal life to the world. Too good to be true; pie in the sky; streets of gold. It is a bunch of bunk, they said, in their learned treatises, bunk used to keep the poor content with their lot in life and to help the rest of us deal with the pain of life. Unrealistic, these cultured despisers would say, and a modern, grown up person is surely called to a realistic account of the universe.

And yet the Gospel is strikingly realistic and accounts for things that much of contemporary thought cannot. We hear Jesus say today, for instance, that life with him is hard, sometimes. To follow him is to follow him where he leads, and if you have noticed, he often went toward difficulties, toward challenge, even toward suffering. He spent time with the sick and lost, with outcasts and those mistreated by others. He was not afraid to speak truth to power, to endure some tension and trouble with other religious leaders. He did not play nice and look for the smoothest waters in which to sail; indeed, he walked with intention toward the Cross, where he meant to join himself to us in the deepest compassion, in suffering love. I don't hear pie in the sky in his call to follow him, to take up a cross, to lose our lives for his sake. This is bracing realism about how hard life in a broken creation is. There is a faithful realism in the teaching that we will share in the transcendence of that brokenness by joining ourselves to the crucified, not by denial or illusion or pretending.

And actually, it is the world that has gotten awfully good at pretending, at endless pie on earth, if not pie in the sky. In 1950, Walt Disney described the California theme park he hoped to build: "The idea of Disneyland is a simple one. It will be a place for people to find happiness and knowledge." And Disneyland become one of the best places for simulating a reality better than the one we have to deal with most of the time. Disney is a vast theatre; "Visitors are referred to as "guests" and park employees as "cast members". "On stage" refers to any area of the resort that is open to guests. "Backstage" refers to any area of the resort that is closed to guests. A crowd is referred to as an "audience". "Show" is the resort's presentation to its guests, such as the color and façades of buildings, placement of rides and attractions, costumes to match the themed lands. Each cast member's job is called a "role". When working in their roles, cast members must follow a "script", a [code of conduct](#) and approved, themed phraseology that cast members may use when at work. "No" and "I don't know" are notably absent from scripts, often frowned

upon or outright banned from use in some roles.” And everything unpleasant or that might poke a hole in the illusion is underground, in the *utilidor* system of tunnels that connects everything. Even effort is hidden. Oh, how I wish I could run the church and the world that way!

You know the great problem with any sermon illustration is that it can be all the congregation remembers, not the point under the illustration. I hope you won't remember this as the anti-Mickey Mouse sermon. I am all for the mouse and the Princesses and the rest of them; he stands here But church is not for a week and life happens every day, not on vacation.