

The Best Service I Almost Botched

Rev. Blaine Tinsley • Unity on Maui • Sunday, October 11, 2026

THE IMPOSSIBLE STANDARD

We all know the moment: the toast that goes sideways, the mind that goes blank, the email sent to the wrong person. Our face gets hot, time stops, and a little voice says, *Well, you've ruined everything*. Many of us carry Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount like a weight on our shoulders: **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"** (Matthew 5:48). For years, I heard that verse as a job description he was failing: don't slip, don't stumble, don't say the wrong thing.

THE WRONG-NAME MEMORIAL SERVICE

I was leading a memorial for a man called Harold: married more than fifty years, lover of fishing, bad puns, and his grandchildren. I had prepared carefully. Three minutes in, I said, "And we will always remember dear *Gerald*," the man whose memorial I had led the week before. The room stopped breathing. My first instinct was to cover it up and keep going. Instead, I stopped, apologized, and said, "Grief does strange things to all of us, even ministers." Then I invited anyone to share a story only they could tell. Grandchildren, neighbors, and family stood up, and laughter and tears filled the room. Afterward, Harold's wife took my hands and said the mistake gave everyone permission to stop trying to be perfect and simply grieve. The service I almost botched became one of the most honest I had ever led.

JESUS WEPT FOR LAZARUS

Jesus never asked mourners to hold it together: **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted"** (Matthew 5:4). When his friend Lazarus died, Jesus did not arrive with a polished speech. Scripture says simply, **"Jesus began to weep"** (John 11:35). The Way-Shower, who knew resurrection was coming, still let his love show, tears and all, and in that same story offered the promise, **"I am the resurrection and the life"** (John 11:25). Tears and holiness belong together. When we stop performing and let ourselves be human, a space becomes more sacred, not less.

JESUS AND THE PEOPLE WHO BOTCHED IT

The Gospels are full of people who botched it, and Jesus keeps choosing them. **Peter** denied Jesus three times, yet Jesus had already prayed for him: "when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). After the resurrection, Jesus met Peter's three denials with three invitations: "Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep" (John 21:15–17). To **the woman brought before the crowd**, Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you" (John 8:11). And **the prodigal son's** father ran to meet him before he could finish his apology (Luke 15:24). Every time, Jesus meets the mistake with grace, and the mistake becomes a beginning.

"BE PERFECT, THEREFORE, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT."

The Greek word translated "perfect" is *teleios*, which means complete, whole, mature, fully what you were meant to be. It does not mean flawless. Jesus is not handing us an impossible standard of a mistake-free life; he is inviting us into wholeness: *be whole, as God is whole*. This is the heart of Unity's teaching. Our true nature is already whole in God, for **"the kingdom of God is among you"** (Luke 17:21), which can also be read "within you."

"YOUR MISTAKES DON'T DEFINE YOU."

Here is the beautiful paradox: when we know we are whole at the deepest level, we are finally free to admit our mistakes, because they no longer define who we are. We can say, **"I got that wrong,"** without believing, **"I am wrong."** A mistake is something we did, not something we are. Jesus never came for the polished people anyway: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matthew 9:12).

“YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL MAKE YOU FREE.”

In John 8:32, Jesus shows us that honesty is the doorway to freedom. Hiding a mistake keeps us bound to fear and image management; telling the truth releases us and everyone around us. At Harold’s memorial, admitting the wrong name did not just free me. It set the whole room free to grieve honestly. Perfectionism is a heavy burden; wholeness is light. As Jesus invites, “Come to me, all you that are weary... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28, 30).

THREE QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK

Carry these three questions with you this week. Write them down, put them on your bathroom mirror, or set them as a reminder on your phone. Ask them once in the morning and once at night.

1 *Where am I afraid of making a mistake?*

This question is about **noticing**. Fear of mistakes often hides as procrastination, over-preparation, or avoidance: the phone call to an estranged family member, the ukulele lessons or hula hālau you never join, the project you keep polishing but never turn in. When you feel that tightness, don’t judge it. Simply name it: *There’s my fear of getting it wrong*. Remember that Jesus prayed for Peter even knowing he would stumble. Spirit isn’t waiting for you to get it right before supporting you.

2 *What am I hiding to look like I have it all together?*

This question is about **honesty**. Most of us keep a highlight reel while the bloopers stay locked away: saying “I’m fine” after a loss, hiding a worry from a spouse, smiling in the pickup line while home feels chaotic, or nodding along when we’re completely lost. What we hide takes enormous energy to protect. This week, choose one safe person and one small thing, and let them see a little more of the real you.

3 *What might open up if I let it be seen?*

This question is about **possibility**. Admitting the wrong name opened a door to a room full of stories. When you tell a friend you’re struggling, you may find they are too. When you say to your child, “I was wrong, and I’m sorry,” you teach that love is bigger than any error. Like the prodigal son, when we stop pretending and come home, we find not condemnation, but welcome. When you catch yourself hiding, pause, ask this question, and take one small step toward being seen.

CLOSING

Jesus turned the world’s wisdom upside down: “**All who humble themselves will be exalted**” (Matthew 23:12). The world says protect your image; Jesus says true greatness begins with the willingness to be seen as we are. I walked into Harold’s memorial wanting to give a perfect service and walked out having given an honest one, and God was far more interested in the second. The moments you think you’ve ruined are not the end of your story. In the hands of Spirit, they can become the beginning of something real.

AFFIRMATION

“I am whole in God. My mistakes do not define me. Grace meets me in every imperfect moment.”