Sermon 21a 2014: When Actions Speak Louder than Words

Introduction: Not Words Only

Most of us are taught that doing what we say and saying what we do are important

   If we want to be known as reliable and trustworthy persons;

   What we say and what we do need to match up as closely as possible

   So that there’s a consistency and purposefulness about the way we live;

   But too often our words and our actions just don’t line up.

A construction crew, not one of ours, was laying a large drainpipe for a new building.

   While digging the trench for the pipe, the workers came across

   A huge electrical cable that crossed directly over the path of their work;

   The excavation halted until an electrician could come over and take a look.

The electrician came and inspected the cable;

   And after a few minutes he told the workers that the cable was dead;

   “Go ahead and cut it out of the way,” he told them.

The foreman of the workers asked, “Are you sure there’s no danger?”

   “Absolutely,” came the reply from the electrician.

   Then the foreman asked, “Well then, will you cut it for us?”

   The electrician hesitated and then answered, “I’m not that sure.”

Sometimes, it’s more appropriate to say, I don’t know or I’m not sure, and then find out;

   Rather than to let our egos get in the way and lose others’ trust;

   And other times when we’re questioned about something;

   We really don’t know until the reality is in front of us and we have to act.

A survey was distributed during worship one Sunday morning in a church;

   And among the questions was, “Do you think everyone in the church should tithe,

   Should everyone give ten percent of their income to our church?”

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The results were very encouraging and the Rector was overwhelmed with the response;
As more than 80% of the congregation checked the yes to tithing;
He knew this was going to be a great fall stewardship campaign
And the church could really get going in their mission
And he announced the results and his hopes the next Sunday in church.

On Monday morning, one of the senior members of the congregation,
Dropped by to talk with the Rector about the survey;
And suggested that perhaps they had asked the wrong question;
Instead of asking ‘do you think we should tithe’,
We should ask, “Will you tithe this year.”

The Rector wasn’t so sure this was necessary but the next Sunday,
There was an insert in the bulletin about stewardship
And they asked just that question, ‘will you tithe’.
An equal number of responses came in on this question,
But instead of 80% answering yes they would tithe,
8 people said they would be tithing that year;
Our words and our actions don’t always line up the way they might.

Every Sunday morning we gather together here to worship and proclaim our faith in God;
To praise God, to say what we believe and declare how we will live our lives;
Praying that God’s will will be done in our lives as it is in heaven,
Promising that we will forgive as we have been forgiven
And that we will go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

And every Monday morning we wake up to our regularly scheduled lives
And all too often set aside our words from our actions
And live as if the words of Sunday morning
Have nothing to do with the way we’re living day to day.
And Jesus stands before us this morning and every morning
   To remind us that it’s the actions that matter more than the words;
   To remind us that saying we are His followers has got to line up
      With the way we’re living our lives;
         That we’ve been called and challenged to ‘walk our talk’.

And Jesus stands before us to remind us to walk our talk not so we can earn our salvation
   Not so that we can do enough to deserve God’s love and mercy and forgiveness;
      Because Jesus has already given these freely by His death and resurrection, by grace.

Jesus calls us to align our words and deeds so we can enter into a life that’s really life;
   So that we can live in God’s will for our lives, live in God’s love
      By having a living relationship with God today and every day;
   And what we do as followers of Jesus allows this relationship to grow
      As we are drawn into God’s community, into God’s life.

**Saying Versus Doing in Today’s Gospel**

It seems to me that this distinction between saying we will and doing God’s will
   Is a major part of what Jesus is driving at in today’s Gospel story
      About the two children who are called by their Father to go and work today.

Merely saying you are willing to answer the call to work in God’s vineyard
   Doesn’t cut it; it isn’t enough;
      You can’t grow up and be transformed by God’s grace and love by all talk
         And no action.

In fact, Jesus says that the people who have told God “no” with their words;
   And have changed their minds, have repented, to use the religious word;
      And gone into our Lord’s service are entering the kingdom of heaven,
         Are experiencing the kingdom and the community of God
     Ahead of us who say yes, but don’t go, who don’t act on our words.
In today’s Gospel, Jesus is speaking to the leading religious people of his day and us;
People who have heard God’s call to go and work in the vineyard,
People who have agreed to go to show and tell of God’s love and mercy,
And to do good for others, but have not always gone.

Jesus tells them this story about the father calling the two sons to work in his vineyard;
As a way to help them and us understand the difference between saying and doing;
The difference between serving God and serving something or someone else.

The first son rejects the call verbally, but ends up going,
While the second son says, “I go, sir”, but does not go.

The one who has said no, but acts on the call from God
Is the one who does the will of the father
And by doing comes into a living relationship with God
And grows up in God’s grace and love as he works on God’s behalf.

The other son, talks a good game, says the right thing, may even mean it in his head;
But doesn’t act in accordance with his words
And misses out on becoming the child of God he is called to be.

We become by doing and as in this story,
I see God’s grace revealed and at work in at least two ways.

At one level, God’s grace and love are revealed in the fact
That even though the first son has said no,
God doesn’t reject him,
God allows him to come anyway and to grow in right relationship;
And enter into his calling.
God’s grace is always there for us,
   Waiting to allow us to act and to become his children as we work in the vineyard;
   As we join in God’s community, as we follow Him.

At another level, God’s grace is revealed in the fact that He has work for us to do,
   Important work that matches each of our gifts and talents and abilities.

This gracious God who calls us to work in the vineyard
   On behalf of God and for the good of others
   Wants us to share in His redeeming and life giving work, every one of us;
   To become by doing.

And in our willingness to answer and to act on God’s call
   We become more and more like Christ
   We more become the whole person God intends for us to be.

**Which Son Are You?**

So which child are you?
   Which of these two is the pattern of your life in Christ?

If I am honest with myself,
   Then my life as a Christian is modeled after both sons in the story.

There are times when I answer the call, “Yes, I’ll go.”
   Times when I say I’ll serve, I’ll work in the vineyard, I’ll do the next right thing;
   But for any variety of reasons: ranging from pride to sin to fear;
   I don’t go and by not going I don’t grow and become.

And there are times when I have said no, have refused,
   And then gone into the vineyard to work, grudgingly sometimes,
   Fearful of the results, unsure of my abilities;
   But have gone to accomplish the tasks God has set before me.
And every time I go I am touched by God’s grace;
   Something changes in me and through the work God is about;
   I come to a new understanding of who I am
   And of the deep and abiding love that God has for me.
   I am changed and always for the better.

God calls each one of us to go and work in the vineyard,
   To show and tell others about the love of God for them,
   To use our gifts and abilities for God’s purposes
   So that we may become the children of God making a difference in the world;
   And growing together as one body, the Church.

And God is you and calling all of us today.

Jesus calls us to match our deeds with our words in following Him, in walking our talk,
   Not so that we can earn God’s grace or forgiveness or love;
   Jesus calls us to match our deeds and our words in following Him,
   So that we can enter into a life that’s really life;
   So that we can have a living relationship with God
   And live in His will for us and for the world around us.

What we do as followers of Jesus allows this relationship to grow
   Because it makes more and more room for God in our lives;
   As we spend time with God in prayer,
   As we serve God in all that we do,
   And as we love our neighbors as ourselves,
   With generosity and mercy.

And so I invite you this morning to make no promises,
   To give no words of assent or agreement,
   But to live from now on in response to God’s grace-filled call on your life;
   That you may have real life now and in the time to come.   Amen.