

“WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? (#3): WORDS AND DEEDS”

(Mark 16:15-18)

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[PROP NEEDED: CD of “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?”]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 10-28-07]

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1. Read Text: Mark 16:15-18 and Pray.

2. **[PLAY SONG “WON’T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?” (time 1:28)...]**
*“It’s a beautiful day in this neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor.
Would you be mine? Could you be mine?...”*

*It’s a neighborly day in this beauty wood, A neighborly day for a beauty.
Would you be mine? Could you be mine?...*

*I’ve always wanted to have a neighbor just like you.
I’ve always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you.*

*So, let’s make the most of this beautiful day. Since we’re together we might as well say:
Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won’t you be my neighbor?
Won’t you please, Won’t you please? Please won’t you be my neighbor?”*¹

3. From 1968 to 2001, PBS TV personality Fred Rogers began his weekly children’s show “Mister Roger’s Neighborhood” with that song, talking about what it means to be a “neighbor.”

A—According to him, a “neighbor” is someone “*just like you*” (and me)... meaning that our “neighbor” is anyone and everyone around us = our fellow human beings.

1—Now, it’s not surprising that this understanding of “neighbor” parallels the teachings of Jesus,² because Fred Rogers was actually an ordained Presbyterian minister.³

2—And as such, he understood that one of the fundamental *practices* of being a Christian was an ability (as Jesus put it) to “*love our neighbor as ourselves.*”⁴

B—And if you’ve been here the last few weeks as we’ve shared a series called What Is A Christian?, you’ll know that we’ve shared the fact that for Jesus, (#1) love of God and (#2) love of neighbor are the twin pillars of what it means to *practice* Christianity.

C—And since we’ve spent two weeks talking about how we can “love God” through *worship* and *stewardship*, today and next week I want us to turn our focus on ways we can “love our neighbor.”

4. And I believe today’s scripture from Mark 16 gives insight into how we can begin doing that.

A–You may have recognized the words there as one form of what is often called Jesus’ “Great Commission,” given to his disciples after his resurrection.

B–But what I want us to notice is the two-fold nature of what he calls his followers to do there:

1–In Verse 15 he says “*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news*” – the focus here being on the *verbal* sharing of our faith.

2–But then in Verses 17-18, the focus shifts to a series of what he calls “*signs*” (or *actions*) that his followers are to be known by – things like casting out demons, and healing the sick.

C–In other words, I believe Jesus is saying here that a Christian is someone who loves their neighbor enough to share their faith with them through both their **Words** AND their **Deeds** (that’s today’s title) – let’s talk about both of these for a moment (outline in bulletin).

–II–

5. First of all, if we really want to love our neighbor, then we don’t need to be afraid of **talking** to them about our faith in God and in Christ.⁵

A–The writer of Psalm 119:13 says “*With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth, [O Lord]*”, and today’s Verse 15 says we’re to “*proclaim the good news*” of God.

B–So, when was the last time you verbally shared with someone about your faith in Christ?

1–It doesn’t need to be a deep, complicated diatribe about Christian “Theology” or “Christology” or “Ecclesiology” (as if most people even know what those *are*), and we certainly don’t need to beat people over the head with the Bible!

2–Instead, we just need to share our experience of God from our heart... perhaps how He’s helped us with some decision we had to make, or a relationship that needed healing, or how our faith has helped us weather some storm or difficulty of life.

6. But of course, there are other people who do nothing BUT talk about their faith, and NEVER back it up by their **Actions and Deeds**.

A–I think that’s why in Verses 17-18 of today’s scripture, Jesus gives a list of *deeds* (“*signs*”) that others are to look for from his followers.

B–James 2 puts it this way:

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith [read here ‘WORDS’] but do not have works? Can faith/WORDS save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith/WORDS by [themselves], if [they have] no works, [are] dead” (Verses 14-17).

C–Many of us have heard before the saying of Francis of Assisi: “*Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.*”

D–You see, in today’s world, our *actions* speak louder (or at least as loud) as our *words*, so we witness our faith to others not only by what we *say*, but also by what we *do*.

7. Now, I need to ask: ...of these two (words or deeds), **which is more important?**⁶

A–Well, let me demonstrate by inviting us all to do a simple exercise:

1–I want everyone to take a deep breath in (hold it)... and then, breath out.... Do it again. Now, which one is more important? (Breathing *in* or *out*?)

2–The same is true of the relationship between *Words* and *Deeds* (what we sometimes call “Evangelism” and “Missions”) – they’re merely two sides to the same coin; two manifestations of the same reality.

B–Evangelist and author George Morris once said that “*Words ACT and Deeds SPEAK.*”⁷

1– In other words, in Jesus’ verbal preaching and teaching, God’s Word was acting, and in Jesus’ actions of healing and casting out of demons, God’s Deeds were speaking His message of love and compassion to the world.⁸

2–So, what we’ve got to understand is that for Jesus, it’s NOT multiple choice! And neither should it be for us!

–III–

8. [TELL STORY OF HELPING HAROLD & DIANE BUCHOLZ...]

About 16 years ago, my wife and I took a weekend to visit a former law school roommate who’d just gotten married. And while it was good to catch up, I remember hearing them tell what a hard time they were having financially – to the degree that they kidded about actually being excited when they received some sample bars of soap in the mail. Now, they weren’t telling us this to make us feel guilty, but before we left the next day, Trish and I decided God was calling us to do something about their situation.

So, we bought a card, wrote in it the scripture from Proverbs 3 about trusting in God for all things (Vss.5-6), added a check for a sizeable amount of money, and placed it on the pillow of our bed as we left.

Now, we didn’t hear anything from our friends for a while, and wondered if they had even found the card. But about a year later they called us up and said they’d be visiting the Atlanta area, and could they stay with us. They came, and we had a great visit, none of us ever mentioning the card.

But after they left, on the pillow of *their* bed was card for *us*. In it was a check in the amount we’d given them the year before, and written in it were words not only thanking us for the original gift, but saying that they were giving the money back now so that we could pass that gift on to someone else that needed it in the future.

9. Since that time, Trish and I have tried to listen to God’s Spirit tell us not only HOW we should help others, but WHO those should be – and we’ve done it several times. But every time we do it, we’re always careful to say WHY: *because God loves them & we do, too.*

A–You know, on his TV show, Fred Rogers didn’t just *talk and sing* about “being a neighbor,” but he also *demonstrated* it through what he *did*.

B—And that’s precisely what Jesus invites all who follow him to do:...to “*Love our neighbor*” by what we *say* and what we *do* – to share God’s love with those around us through both our “*Words And Deeds.*”

10. As we close, I want to invite each of us to pray in unison words written over 500 years ago by Teresa of Avila, who understood the importance of both Word and Deed in our Christian walk (you’ll find her prayer printed in the bulletin and on screen...) – please pray it with me:

Prayer of Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

*“Lord God, Christ has no body now on earth but our body;
Christ has no hands but our hands; Christ has no feet but our feet;
Christ has no love but our love;
to tell of his goodness; to heal the world's wounds;
to teach the way of love.
Help us to be your hands, your feet, your mouth, your body for the world.
In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

ENDNOTES:

1. “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?”, Lyrics and Music © 1967 by Fred M. Rogers (http://pbskids.org/rogers/songlist/song1_ra.html).
2. Read Luke 10:25-37 (the parable of the “Good Samaritan”).
3. He attended the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and was ordained in 1963 in the Presbyterian Church with a charge to work with children and families through television (www.snopes.com/radiotv/tv/mrrogers.asp).
4. Matthew 22:39.
5. For whatever reason, this is perhaps that hardest thing for those of us in mainline churches (like Methodism) to do. Oh, we’re great at feeding the hungry and helping the poor, but we have a hard time “naming the name” in which we do those things. Some of us are afraid we’ll offend people, or be rejected, or simply not be “cool.”
6. After all, I’ve heard some people say that they have “gifts” for *one* of these, but not for the other – that, for example, we don’t mind *servicing* others; but we don’t feel “called” to *talk* about why; OR, we can *talk* about Jesus all day, but don’t feel “called” to the “*liberal, social justice thing.*”
7. Dr. George Morris, spoken at the “Academy for the Practice of Christian Ministry” Evangelism Module at Simpsonwood Conference and Retreat Center, October 23, 2007. At the same event, he also said that “*The moment is too urgent in today’s world to separate word and deed – the gospel is both verbal and visual.” An evangelism document called the “Manila Manifesto” puts it this way: “*Good News and good works are inseparable [partners]*” (Ronald Sider, *One-Sided Christianity?*, p. 175).*
8. Here is an example of this concept “in action”: The story is told that Samuel Bradburn, an associate of the founder of Methodism John Wesley, was on one occasion in rather desperate financial need. When Wesley learned of his circumstances, he sent him a five-pound note (then worth about \$10) with the following letter: “Dear Sammy: Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed’. Yours affectionately, John Wesley.” Bradburn’s reply was prompt. “*Rev. and Dear Sir: I have often been struck with the beauty of the passage of Scripture quoted in your letter, but I must confess that I never saw such a useful expository ‘note’ on it before.*”