

## Walk the Talk

### [Matthew 21:23-32](#)

In today's scripture lesson, we see a bit of Jesus during the last week of his life before the crucifixion. This event would have taken place on Tuesday of Holy week. We see the Jewish religious leaders of the day trying to find fault with Jesus. Why? It seems Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees were on the same side, doesn't it? Aren't they all God's chosen ones? What happened to make the religious leaders see Jesus as a threat?

It seems the religious leaders of Jesus' time became consumed with 'doing church'. The Pharisees and Sadducees were experts on keeping Jewish law. They read and interpreted the Torah for the masses, most of whom could not read. They tracked the community members to make sure the sacrifices and rituals were observed at the right times. This included collecting

tithes and temple taxes – an extra layer of fees attached to temple functions. Under Roman occupation, the temple leaders were allowed to keep their leadership status provided they paid their taxes to Rome and helped to keep order. Rome was a large empire. It would have been impossible to keep order without engaging the helps of locals. The religious leaders provided Rome with a perfect solution. In return, the people were allowed to continue their worship and religious practices and the leaders were able to maintain their religious authority.

At some point the Pharisees and Sadducees veered off in a different direction. They had forgotten about the poor and the widows. They forgot about sharing God's love through charity. Instead they were charging the poor with temple taxes in order to stay holy. Pastor John Williams III shares this story:

“Two Kentucky farmers who owned racing stables had developed a keen rivalry. One spring, each of them entered a horse in a local steeplechase. Thinking that a professional rider might help him outdo his friend, one of the farmers engaged a crack jockey. The two horses were leading the race at the last fence, but it proved too tough for them. Both horses fell, unseating their riders. But this calamity did not stop the professional jockey. He quickly remounted and won the race. Returning triumphant to the paddock, the jockey found the farmer who had hired him fuming with rage. ‘What’s the matter,’ the jockey asked. ‘I won, didn’t I?’ ‘Oh, yes,’ roared the farmer. ‘You won all right, but you still don’t know, do you?’ ‘Know what?’ asked the jockey. ‘You won the race on the wrong horse!’ It appears the religious leaders had gotten on the wrong horse and crossed the finish line in failure of God’s

will. They would talk the talk, but they were not interested in walking the walk.

Serving others – that is the work in the vineyard. We are back in the vineyard this week because there is a lot of work to do. As part of our sanctifying grace, we are charged with putting our faith into action. If we decide to only accept God's justifying grace and not begin our faith journey, we are like the son who told the father he would go and work in the vineyard but never does. Methodism became known as the religion for the people. One of the chief characteristics of the Methodist movement both here and in Europe was the way leaders were bringing the message to the people. In Europe, Anglican churches were primarily in the big cities. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a vast majority of the population did not live in the big cities. Of those that did, the vast majority were poor and

destitute. Methodism was carried out to where the people were. Acts of kindness, justice and mercy were the cornerstones of the movement. Preaching the gospel and doing works of charity were a natural marriage in the early days of Methodism and they still are today. Had the founders of Methodism only been concerned with preaching the word, I do not believe the enthusiasm and evangelism of the movement would have been nearly as great.

We are often judged by our actions. We could give eloquent speeches about doing good works for others, but unless we actually do them we are not moving on toward sanctifying grace – we are not walking the talk. Our scripture uses the terms ‘tax collectors and prostitutes’ as words for sinners. The message to the religious leaders is that those who at first have turned away from God’s love, then decide to accept God for

themselves and go and share God's love with others, they are like the son who originally said no to his father but then changes his mind and goes and works in the vineyard. Those will be the ones to see their heavenly reward.

Members of our community are hurting. There are those dealing with issues of economic difficulties, broken families, illness, incarceration. These are the ones who need God now more than ever. If we wait for them to cross our threshold, we are not fulfilling our call to work in the vineyard. Small gestures can mean so much to someone who is hurting.

Some may be discouraged – they are having a hard time finding joy in anything. I was listening to the UMW presentation last Sunday from Ann Shilling of the SanMar Children's home. We heard a lot about children who are hurting and in need of guidance we take for granted. What struck me

was how this congregation immediately looked for ways to support this mission. No one was hindered by the fact that we are a small congregation. No one focused on what we couldn't do. The need was introduced, and the planning began to find ways to meet the need. I then listened to plans being made to provide holiday baskets to members in the community who live alone. What a powerful ministry. We may not see it as an extension of God's love but there is no question that these acts are putting our faith into action. We may never know how someone is blessed by receiving a gift basket and a short visit during the holidays. We are not only combating loneliness, we are sharing God's love and Christian fellowship.

Some of us may be in the category of the lost and hurting. We feel called by God, but we are so overwhelmed by our own trials and tribulations we don't feel we could be any good to

anyone else. For those who have participated in some of these local ministries, one thing I see is there is a tremendously positive effect on the workers. Suddenly, we realize that there are others out there who are also hurting. When we can put aside our own trials to help someone else, somehow God touches our hearts and we are not quite so burdened. We can use our time in service to others as a type of meditation. What are we trying to do? We are showing that God's love is not confined to the church sanctuary. We are showing that God's grace extends to everyone, not just a select few. We are showing that acts of human kindness reflect divine principles.

We have heard the clichés: “Actions speak louder than words.” “You may be the only Bible others will ever read.” I’m sure there are others. As we continue on our faith journey of sanctifying grace, we are becoming more like Christ. Perhaps

we can help heal the sick by providing a cool cloth to a fevered brow. Perhaps we can cast out demons by visiting those who are troubled and sharing a kind word to be the face, hands and feet of Christ to those in need. Perhaps we can help to feed the masses through gifts of baskets at Christmas time. Perhaps we can share God's love with troubled teenagers by simply spending time with them and while doing crafts or cooking really listen to them and maybe even sneak in some teaching on character! The workers are few and the harvest is plentiful. Let us be the active message of Christ to a hurting and troubled world. Let us walk the talk. Amen.