

Sermon – Sunday, August 27, 2023

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At one time or another, we've all had the experience of someone saying one thing and doing another. For example, the weather person forecasting snow and cold and telling us to bundle up while sitting in front of us in a sleeveless dress? Or the person urging us to eat a healthy diet while munching on chips.

We've also had the experience of evaluating whether a person would be good at a particular job before hiring them. The job calls for someone good at details, and an applicant writes on their resume that they handle details well. The only problem is they misspell details, for example.

Sometimes, we're guilty of saying one thing and doing another, too. We may deceive ourselves into thinking we really are doing what we say. Or, maybe we can't manage to behave as we'd like. Sometimes, we make a mistake now and then.

In today's Gospel, Simon Peter makes a clear and passionate confession that Jesus is the Messiah. He makes that declaration despite the rest of the world refusing to believe who Jesus is. Peter is bold in his confession.

We might expect that declaration to cause Peter to remain devoted to Jesus. Indeed, Jesus proclaims that the church will be built on faith, such as Peter's. Yet we know that not long after this exchange with Jesus, Simon will deny He even knows Jesus. When Jesus is in the Tomb, Simon returns to fishing as if He thinks all the adventures with Jesus are over. Peter says one thing but sometimes does another.

When we are baptized or confirmed, we declare that we believe in God, Jesus as God's Son, the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection. We agree to follow the apostles' teaching, attend Eucharistic services, and continue with the prayers. We promise to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to others, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to respect the dignity of every human being. Although our Baptismal Covenant has more words than Peter's declaration, it essentially says the same thing. It says that we believe Jesus is the Messiah. It also says that because of that belief, we'll live differently. It says we'll live differently than those in the world who do not believe. The Covenant calls to act in the ways Paul describes in his letter: discerning what is good and loving others even though the world may fail to. It calls for us to seek justice when the world fails to be just and to seek peace amid chaos and controversy.

Like Peter, sometimes we act in line with what we say and sometimes make a big mess of things. Those outside the church often say they don't join us because they fail to see how knowing Jesus has made a difference in our lives. Many have heard Mahatma Gandhi's quote, "I like your Christ, but I don't like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." Gandhi's quote came after he read the Scriptures, became interested in Christ, and visited a church to learn more. The ushers forbade him entry because he was of a lower caste than the rest of the church. They neglected to see

Christ in Gandhi, to be just to him, or to treat him with dignity. Their actions belied their confession and Gandhi never became a Christian.

Living in line with our confession of Jesus as Messiah is difficult. A few things may help us do a better job of linking our actions with our words. The first is prayer – daily prayer. In our prayers, we honor God, thank God for what God has done in our lives, remember the needs of others, and ask God to help us grow in our faith and ability to live as Christians. Regular participation in a faith community also helps us keep our actions in line with what we say because that community holds us accountable.

Remembering that we are people in a long line of Christians and faithful worshippers of God may also help. God has hewn us out of the same rock as some of those we honor for their faith – Abraham, Sarah, and Peter. God has given us their faith, and, more importantly, God has given us the same promises. God will increase our strength when we call on God. God also will never leave us. Also, when we act in line with our faith, nothing can prevail against us. As individuals, we stand firm. As a church, we transform lives.

We aren't perfect, and despite our best efforts, we sometimes fail to act like we believe that Jesus is the Messiah. The good news is that we can be the people we profess to be because Jesus is who He is. Jesus is the Messiah. He forgives us, saves us, changes us, and dwells in us. When we mess up, we seek and receive God's forgiveness. He never leaves us. And, if we can keep the first part of the Covenant – which is to continue with prayers and regular worship – God will help us keep the rest of the Covenant.

God will stir up in us the need for justice. God will help us serve Christ in others and respect the dignity of even the most challenging individual. We keep striving, and along the way, Jesus transforms us into the good news we confess.