

At Home Worship
September 27, 2020
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God's creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

The obedience God requires is not just what we say with our mouths, but what we do with our lives.

Faith expressed through prayer must also be expressed through the way we live.

God's word is clear: Sinners who repent will find God's mercy before praying people who do as they please.

We desire to put our faith into practice by living in obedience to God's will.

This is our prayer, Lord! Thanks be to You!

Father of all mercies, you call us to do your will. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and garden-variety sinners, you call us all, that we might enter your kingdom. May we run swiftly to answer your call, that receiving the joy that you have promised, we would forever sing your praise, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise" #2031 x 2

We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. And we offer up to you the sacrifices of thanksgiving; and we offer up to you the sacrifices of joy.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

We are very promising in our prayers, Father. But when it comes to daily life, we find reasons to postpone the fulfillment of our promises. Forgive us for saying so much, and doing so little. Inspire us to live obedient lives to your honor and glory; that your promised mercy may be fulfilled in us. (silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen.

Psalm 103:8-12

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. The good news in Christ is that when we face ourselves and God with the awareness of our need, we are given grace to grow, and courage to continue the journey. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

When Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Matthew 21:23-27

A construction crew was laying a drain line as part of a new building. While excavating, the workers uncovered a power cable directly in the path of their work. The excavation was halted. An electrician was called in. The electrician came and looked at the cable. He assured workers that the cable was dead. "Go ahead and cut it out of the way," the electrician told the workers. The foreman asked, "Are you sure there is no danger?" "Absolutely," was the reply. Then the foreman asked, "Well, then, will you cut it for us?" The electrician hesitated for a moment and then answered: "I'm not that sure."

A survey was distributed during worship one Sunday morning. Among the questions was, "Do you think there should be an evening Bible Study?" The young pastor was overwhelmed at the response. Over fifty persons indicated that there should be an evening Bible study. The elated pastor began making plans. A day or two later the wise, experienced lay leader came to visit the pastor. Gently he advised the young man that he had asked the wrong question. Instead of asking, "Do you think there should be a Bible study?" the pastor should have asked, "Are you willing to attend an evening Bible study?" A second questionnaire was issued. This time the question was "Are you willing to attend Bible study?" The result was quite different from the week before. This time only twelve persons indicated that they would be willing to attend.

Let's set our parable for the day in its proper context. Tension was in the air the day Jesus entered the temple. Certain religious officials were plotting against him. They viewed him as a threat. Jesus' teachings ran counter to their tradition. They had to do something to silence him. They decided to try to try to incriminate him. They asked him a two-part question, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" It was an obvious trap. No matter how Jesus answered, he would have been in trouble. Knowing it was a trap he countered with a question of his own. "Did the baptism of John come from heaven," he asked, "or was it of human origin?" This question caught the religious leaders by surprise. They did not know how to answer. They began arguing among themselves, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'" On the other hand if they answered that John's authority came from human origin that might cause a riot because many in the crowd thought that John was a prophet sent by God. They realized it was a no-win situation. No matter how they answered, they would be in trouble. They finally said, "We do not know." Jesus told them that he would not answer their question either.

SOMETIMES WE ARE BLIND TO WHAT GOD IS DOING IN OUR MIDST.

That was certainly true of these officials. Jesus was standing in front of them and they failed to recognize him. That happens sometimes.

John Powell is a professor of theology at Loyola University in Chicago. He tells a story about a former student who begrudgingly took one of his theology courses. It soon became evident that Tommy didn't want to study theology, but it was a required course. Near the end of the class, Tommy had a question to ask, "Professor Powell, do you think I will ever find God?" Father Powell knew all too well that Tommy was not only cynical about God, but that he also was the self-appointed "atheist in residence." The professor thought for a moment and honestly replied, "No, I don't. I don't think you will ever find God, Tommy" but I am absolutely certain that God will find you!"

With that Tommy left the classroom without saying another word. They did not see each other for some time. Then one day, out of the blue, Tommy walked into Father Powell's office. There was something different about Tommy. He told his former professor that he had a terminal illness and did not have long to live. His once youthful body had already started to deteriorate, but his eyes were bright, and his face was aglow.

"What I really came to see you about," Tommy said, "was what you said to me on the last day of class. When the doctors removed the lump and told me it was malignant, well, I got real serious about locating God...I really began banging bloody fists against the doors of heaven," he said. But God did not come out. In fact, nothing happened.

Tommy went on to tell Father Powell that he never really had a good relationship with his father. Tommy did not want to die, however, without ever expressing his love for his dad. So he went home. "My dad was reading the newspaper," Tommy said. It was awkward but Tommy finally said the words, "Dad, I love you" that's all. I just wanted you to know that." The newspaper fluttered to the floor. "Then my father did two things I could never remember him ever doing before," Tommy said, "he cried, and he hugged me. One day I turned around," Tommy told his former professor," and God was there. He didn't come to me when I pleaded with him. But the important thing is that he found me."

Sometimes we are blind to God's activity in our midst. This brings us to a second truth:
SOMETIMES OUR ACTIONS DO NOT MATCH OUR WORDS.

Jesus told the religious officials a parable. A farmer had two sons. The father went to his first son and said, "Go and work in the vineyard today." The son was somewhat rebellious. He replied, "I will not." The father was disappointed, but said nothing further.

The farmer then asked his second son if he would help out in the vineyard. "I go, sir!" he told his father. Any parent would be proud of such a child. With the assurance that the second son would help, the farmer went to work in another section of the vineyard.

Things didn't quite turn out the way the father expected. The first son, who answered, "I will not," changed his mind and spent the entire day working in his father's vineyard. The second son, the one who said, "I go, sir!" also had a change of mind. Maybe some of his friends came by and asked him to go with them. The second son, the one who promised to help his father, did not. Jesus asked the

chief priests and the elders of the temple, "Which of the two did the will of his father?" "The first," they answered. The parable puzzled them. They never dreamed it was about them.

Bestselling author, Stephen Covey, writes about the time he was a faculty member at the Marriott School of Management. One of the young executives asked him how he was doing in class. As they talked for a while Stephen Covey confronted him directly: "You didn't really come in to find out how you are doing in class," he said. You came in to find out how I think you are doing. You know how you are doing in the class far better than I do, don't you?"

The young executive answered that he knew how he was doing in class. He admitted that he was just trying to get by. He gave a host of reasons and excuses for cramming and taking short cuts. The young man had come in to see if it was working. Covey, reflecting on this incident, writes, "If people play roles and pretend long enough, giving in to their vanity and pride, they will gradually deceive themselves."

Such was the case of these religious officials. They had been using all the right words, going through all the right ceremonies. They had God on their lips, but not in their hearts. They had said "yes" to God, but He was not real to them. Sometimes we are blind to God's activity in our midst. Sometimes our actions do not match our words. And one final thought:

SOMETIMES THE SPIRIT BREAKS THROUGH.

Jesus told the chief priest and elders of the temple, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." What Jesus told them was unthinkable. These men were the best people in the land. Yet Jesus said tax collectors and prostitutes were going into the kingdom ahead of them. You see, these officials had used their religion to insulate themselves against God. They had their traditions. They had their rules. They really had no need for God. The folks at the bottom of society, on the other hand, had nothing - except God. True, they had said "no" to God sometime in the past, but if they said "yes" now, it was not too late. The officials, on the other hand, had once said "yes," but they had never let God into their lives.

Jesus reminded these officials of the preaching of John the Baptist. "Tax collectors and the prostitutes believed (John)," Jesus said, "and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him." Change was possible even for these men, but they were too blind to see. They did not realize that the message of repentance was for them, too.

A pastor in San Diego was called into the sanctuary early one morning. The custodian wanted him to see a strange offering that had been left on the altar. Hanging on the altar were a pair of brown corduroy pants, a belt, a white T-shirt, a pair of tan suede boots, and a note. He noticed blood stains on both the shirt and on the note. The note consisted of only three words, "Please listen God." It was signed and included a phone number.

The pastor dialed the number. A nineteen-year-old man answered and told his story. He had run away from home and had been wandering in a wasteland of drugs, drifting from one place to another, getting into all kinds of trouble and involved in all kinds of sordid behavior. The night before he had hit bottom. There had been a fight and an almost fatal beating. After making sure the victim of his assault would be all right in the emergency room of a nearby hospital, this young man

came to the church, found an unlocked door, and went into the sanctuary. He stayed there all night, crying, and praying. He asked God to forgive him and show him the way to go. All at once the presence of God became real to him. He knew God was there. He felt God's forgiveness. A wonderful peace came over him. He committed himself to Jesus Christ. He was determined to make right the things he had messed up.

The young man felt fresh and clean, like a new person. To symbolize his new life and new commitment, he had put on some new clothes he had with him in his bedroll and had left his old clothes on the altar as a kind of offering, giving God his old life. He walked out the door a new person filled with a new hope, a new life, a new direction. This young man, like the first son in the parable, at one time in his life said "I will not," but later changed his mind and found new life.

I wonder if the religious officials got the point of Jesus' parable? I wonder if you and I get the point - for the message of repentance is for us as well. Sometimes we are blind to God's actions in our life. Sometime we are all talk and no action. Sometimes we refuse to let God break into our lives and help us make a new start by His grace. A farmer had two sons....

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn “Revive Us Again”

1. We praise Thee, O God, for the Son of Thy love, for Jesus Who died, and is now gone above.

Refrain:

Hallelujah! Thine the glory. Hallelujah! Amen. Hallelujah! Thine the glory. Revive us again.

2. We praise Thee, O God, for Thy Spirit of light, Who has shown us our Savior, and scattered our night.

Refrain:

Hallelujah! Thine the glory. Hallelujah! Amen. Hallelujah! Thine the glory. Revive us again.

3. All glory and praise to the Lamb that was slain, Who hath borne all our sins, and hath cleansed every stain.

Refrain:

Hallelujah! Thine the glory. Hallelujah! Amen. Hallelujah! Thine the glory. Revive us again.

4. Revive us again; fill each heart with Thy love; May each soul be rekindled with fire from above.

Refrain:

Hallelujah! Thine the glory. Hallelujah! Amen. Hallelujah! Thine the glory. Revive us again.

Blessing

Jesus says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen. Revelation 22:20-21