

Actions Speak Louder
John 10:22-30
Colebrook Congregational Church
April 17, 2016 / 4th Sunday of Easter

In today's passage, it is wintertime, and Jesus is at the Temple, so He enters through the portico of Solomon, which was located where the mosque on the Temple Mount currently is, because it's more enclosed and presumably warmer. He is there for the Festival of Dedication, but we know of this festival by a different name: Channukah.

Last week, I mentioned a group of books that are in Catholic Bibles, but not Jewish or Protestant ones, which include histories from the time in between the Old and New Testaments, called the Deuterocanonical books. They are considered worthy of being read, but are not considered at the same level as the rest of the Bible.

After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire was divided up into smaller empires, and the area of Judea was ruled by the Ptolemies of Egypt. But then one of the neighboring Seleucid kings conquered the area. Both groups respected Jewish traditions and institutions, but 30 years later, one of Seleucid kings ordered Judaism outlawed, an altar to Zeus built in the Temple, and that pigs were to be sacrificed upon it. This led to the Maccabean Revolt, and three years later, the Temple was purified and rededicated. While Adam Sandler's Hannukah Song tells us that it's a “festival of lights” and “eight crazy nights,” Channukah is celebrated to commemorate how the few & pure overcame the many and impure against great odds.

Every time that Jesus attends a Festival in John's Gospel, He is beset upon by hostile people trying to trick Him or otherwise cause problems. This time, they want Him to tell them plainly whether or not He is the Anointed One or not. Jesus has not declared Himself in the Temple, but revealed Himself with the miracles and actions done out among the people. This is the reason for His response to them. He said, “The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe...” His actions speak for themselves. His actions speak better than any words that He can say to them.

He then tells the hostile people, that because of their nature and disposition, they are unable to recognize Him by His actions. So then, why bother with His words? Jesus then uses the allegory of the Shepherd to illustrate His relationship with the Believers. A Shepherd is known to their flock and will even protect the flock at the expense of themselves. A perfect symbolic representation for Jesus, who is known to us, the Believers, whenever we help others or whenever we ourselves need help; and Jesus keeps us safe, and even laid down His life in atonement for our sins.

As the Shephard, Jesus' actions speak for themselves and even speak louder than anything that He could say to them at that moment, maybe even at any moment! Jesus had already performed miracles, healing the blind and the crippled prior to this moment. Those actions speak loud and clear about who Jesus is.

A lesson that my father taught me was to let others speak of my praises instead boasting of them myself. That way they are given more credence. And also letting my actions speak for themselves. I could say whatever I want, but if I do nothing, my words are worthless. He told me a story about a father telling his son that he should always honest. Never lie. A good trait to teach one's child! However, when they went to the movie theater, a sign said that children aged ten and under are charged less, and the father told his eleven year old son to say that he was ten to pay the lower price. Which lesson is that boy going to remember? Which one spoke louder?

A friend of mine works for a hotel chain. She is a department head and her boss is the hotel manager. Her boss has been wondering why he isn't liked or even respected as a boss by the employees. He wants them to follow company policies and do their jobs well. However, he is usually late to his shifts, and leaves early, definitely not working his 40 hours. He brings his dog to a pet-free environment, and does not allow the children of employees to wait there 10 minutes for their rides. He takes extra vacation and extra long lunch breaks. Not the kind of behavior a supervisor is expected to put up with, but he engages in it himself. His actions speak louder than anything he could say, resulting in a resentful staff.

My friend, on the other hand, she is always early to her shifts. She also schedules herself regularly to work weekends and evenings, not just the usual day shifts. She is a manager who is willing to work in the trenches alongside the regular employees, sharing what they go through. She even makes herself available on her days off to assist with problems that come up at work! Her actions speak louder than any words, and it has earned her the respect of her workers.

Actions speak louder than words. We can say whatever we want, but if it is not backed up with our actions, what good are they? We can claim to be or do anything we want, but if we do not follow through with it, what is the point of speaking? This is what Jesus is talking about. Jesus revealed his true nature publicly through his actions miraculously healing those in need. Anyone could stand up and claim to be the Messiah, but if they do not follow up with the actions of a Messiah, so what? Jesus didn't have to claim to be the Messiah, He just engaged in the activity of the Messiah, because Actions Speak Louder.

Please join me in the Spirit of Prayer:

O God, we give you thanks, for Jesus is the Good Shepherd, our Good Shepherd, who knows us all, who we follow when Called, who keeps us safe from harm, and who even laid down His life for us. He is our Messiah, displayed by acts of miraculous powers, not just eloquent words. Jesus' actions speak louder. Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[Pause]

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after His resurrection, teaching them to love all people as neighbors. As his disciples in this age, we offer our prayers on behalf of the creation in which we are privileged to live and our neighbors with whom we share it.

We give you thanks for all the blessings and gifts you have given us, for those you have led into our lives and for moving us into the lives of others. And we thank you for using us as instruments of your divine love for us all.

We pray for the forgiveness of sins known and unknown, for falling short of how we should be towards ourselves, towards our fellow humans, and to all of Your Creation. May we be reassured of Your forgiveness, so we may try to do better and make amends as we move forward.

We raise those who are struggling with illness, with despair over their lives, or with the breakdown of relationships. We raise up those places in our world where war, violence, poverty and need are the experiences of everyday life. We hold in our hearts the pain of those suffering violence, bereavement or conflict. May the light of Christ shine upon them, and may you fortify us to better serve you through our service to our neighbors.

We pray for ourselves. We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, to live up to the standard Jesus set for us. We pray that we recognize your messengers and those You send to help us and redirect us for who they are, and that we show the wisdom to heed them.

We especially pray for:

Open our hearts to your power moving around us and between us and within us, until Your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and enemy, in communities transformed by justice and compassion, and in the healing of all that is broken. Amen.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

John 10:22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."