

Sermon Epiphany 5 Year A February 6, 2011

A quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi says, *“Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”* The 16th-century French writer Michel de Montaigne interpreted St. Francis’ quote this way, *“Saying is one thing and doing is another.”* The precursor to our expression *Actions speak louder than words.*

I think our readings today invite us to reflect on these quotes which all make the same point....how we live our lives tells more about who we are and what we believe more than anything we can possibly say. All of our readings invite us to enter into the work that God would have us do and to use our life as an example to preach the gospel.

Isaiah implores us to “share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless into your house; satisfy the needs of the afflicted.... then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like noon-day.”

Psalms 112 speaks about the benefits of living a righteous life. “Light shines in the darkness for the upright...They have given freely to the poor, and their righteousness stands fast forever.”

In this passage of Paul’s from his letter to the church in Corinth he says it is not through his speech and proclamation that his power comes, but from the power of the Spirit working within him.

In our gospel, Jesus uses ordinary things understood by the common person as a way to metaphorically underscore his point of seeking to live a righteous life. He says, *“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its flavor it is no longer good for anything than to be thrown down and trampled under foot.”*

Because of the extreme value of salt in the ancient world (1) for healing and cleansing; (2) for preserving food; (3) for flavoring food; and (4) for sustaining moisture in humans in very dry climates, salt was a prized possession. It was often used to pay soldiers’ wages. Christians are called the “salt of the earth” because of their penetrating and preserving power in a lost world. Believers are salt. It is not an option. The only choice is what kind of salt will they be.

Salt that was unusable as a preservative or flavor enhancer was absolutely useless. It was thrown on the footpaths or roof tops to form a hard top seal. Salt taken from the Dead Sea had many impurities. The people in this part of the world were accustomed to unusable salt.

“You are the light of the world” Light has always been a biblical metaphor of truth and healing. It was used by Jesus to describe Himself. The question is not, “Will you be the light of the world?” As a believer, you are the light of the world. The only real question is, “What kind of light will you be?” All that some people know about God, they know from you and your life!

“Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” I want to share with you a story that was sent to me by a friend that touched me and I think helps illustrate this point.

A few years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night's dinner. In their rush, with tickets and briefcases, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table, which held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane in time for their nearly missed boarding. **ALL BUT ONE!**

He paused, took a deep breath, and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned. He told his buddies to go on without him, waved good-bye, told one of them to call his wife when they arrived at their home destination and explain his taking a later flight. Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the terminal floor. He was glad he did.

The 16-year-old girl was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her, no one stopping and no one to care for her plight. The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped organize

her display. As he did this, he noticed that many of them had become battered and bruised; these he set aside in another basket. When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, 'Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you okay?' She nodded through her tears. He continued on with, 'I hope we didn't spoil your day too badly.'

As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, 'Mister.....' He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes. She continued, 'Are you Jesus?' He stopped in mid-stride, and he wondered. Then slowly he made his way to catch the later flight with that question burning and bouncing about in his soul:

'Are you Jesus?'

Do people mistake you for Jesus? That's our Destiny, is it not? To be so much like Jesus that people cannot tell the difference as we live and interact with a world that is blind to His love, life and grace.

If we claim to know Him, we should live, walk and act as He would.. Knowing Him is more than simply quoting Scripture and going to church. It's actually living the Word as life unfolds day to day. You are the apple of God's eye even though we, too, have been bruised by a fall. He stopped what He was doing and picked you and me and paid in full the price for our damaged fruit.

My beloved people, *“Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”* Amen.