

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Unstuck. Ready and Willing?"
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Last week we spoke about the internal side of the Christian faith journey, and what to do when you feel stuck with a negative attitude or behaviour. This week, we're looking at the external side of the Christian faith journey, which involves actions. All our attitudes eventually wind up in some kind of action, so there is ultimately no divorce between what we believe and what we do. Even when we try to not act in line with what we really believe, we usually fail. Our beliefs, values, and attitudes severely effect our actions. And they should.

This is why we need to monitor what we believe and how we act, in line with our relationship to God. The central aspect of Christianity is this relationship. This is why God speaks to Isaiah the way he does. God's initiative is the continual call to dialogue, worded this way: Come, let us reason together, says the Lord. (Isaiah 1: 18) When this relationship is in good order, our attitudes and our actions are in good order. When this relationship with God is off, then our attitudes and actions are off.

God says to Israel through the prophet Isaiah, that he is tired of their religious ceremonies. The reason why God is tired of their religious ceremonies is because the people's actions prove they do not believe what is important to God is important to them. The people show their real beliefs when they hurt the oppressed, and do not care about either the fatherless or orphans, widows and others who do not have the basics of life, in fact no status and no income in those days.

God warns the people then and us now to make sure our actions in fact line up with what God finds important. And all this comes in a call to negotiate together, to reason together, to talk out what living out our faith looks like. Otherwise our apathy, greed or even hatred toward others speaks louder to God, then our caring, loving and compassion. Our actions are speaking at least as loudly as our words.

The Psalmist in Psalm 50 does remind us of the fact that God does love our worship services. Singing praise to God is a good thing. The Psalmist warns us to not forget God, to not sideline the relationship we have with

God. In our actions, we show what we truly believe. So the Psalmist says that if we steal, or commit adultery, or slander others whether in our hearts or with our words and deeds, then be warned! God sees these actions and the true desire of our hearts behind our actions. We must continue to come back to our relationship with God to be changed from any wicked ways within us. Because the reality is that although we are being changed from our old ways of rebellion against God, still some of these attitudes and actions persist. We need to choose to go God's way, otherwise we may find ourselves being opposed by God, rather than having the comfort of this divine relationship, we will have the trials that come with going against that relationship. This is true in ignoring our relationship with God, but is also true if we ignore our relationship with our spouses, friends, children, grandchildren, etc. These relationships do not automatically get better and better. Ignoring them or doing things against them have consequences, whether we are aware of it or not.

The author of Hebrews reminds us that faith is trusting in someone we cannot see. It is trusting God for our future path, our daily decisions and asking for help when we cannot see. We need other human beings to help us choose to trust God. Otherwise we can choose unwisely and rebelliously. We need to be reminded as it says in Hebrews that our citizenship really is in heaven, not Canada or the United States, or the United Kingdom or some other nation on the earth, but heaven. We shall see that all those people over the centuries who knew their real home was not here, but there, shall be rewarded and counted as wise. This does not relieve us of responsibility for stewardship of our properties, rentals, environment and earth. This sincerely draws us back to relationship with God that informs our positions on these important matters. We are stewards, because we will give an account to God for what we have done in this life. Abraham was praised not because he was willing to move so often, but because he was willing to listen to God and obey. He looked forward more to what God was doing in his life, than what he or others were doing with their lives. We need to consider Abraham's life and ask if we are doing the same.

In Luke 12, the Lord Jesus has the final word on this whole question of attitudes and actions. Jesus insinuates that it is possible to sleep through our spiritual commitments, and be suddenly awakened to the fact that we have little or no clothing on, no flashlight and no way to deal with the robber stealing your most precious possessions. The way to stay awake is to not only be consciously aware of your relationship with God, but also actually

investing in that relationship. Coming to church weekly is good. The writer to the Hebrews notes that some are in the habit of giving up meeting together, but we should be encouraging each other, and all the more because Jesus is going to return. (Hebrews 10:25) This was true nearly two thousand years ago and is as true today, perhaps more so in Canada.

We need not only to come on Sundays, but meet together in small groups during the week to explore and increase in our knowledge of God and our experience of God together. In these small groups, we find that we can grow in relationship to God and one another. We can understand the Bible more clearly and we can take action in the community in line with what is important to God, and what will help the most vulnerable in our city and province and nation.

Jesus uses this parable or image of being ready, even in the middle of the night for a visitor, expected or unexpected. In the days before all the communication devices we take for granted existed, you couldn't tell when someone was coming, so you had to be ready to greet them at the door, even if it was the middle of the night. They might need food and water, shelter and even medical care.

Jesus says we need to be ready with our lights in hand in the midst of the darkness, our clothes on, and an alertness to what is going on. Instead of that welcome visitor, it might be someone experimented with B&E, break and enter, to see what they might grab. These are word pictures to encourage us to grow in our relationship with God, so when unexpected crises come up, and they will, then we can approach them with the wisdom and love of God, rather than shock and awe. When Jesus comes again we will have no more time to develop our relationship with God. Today is the day to start doing so.

The real question remains what time we will spend on the goal of knowing God, having our will turned over to God, having God's will shape our own, and pursuing what God wants in our lives as a primary rather than peripheral goal. Let's open ourselves to the possibility of new things this Fall: new groups, or joining established ones, linking with other churches, caring for those at the university, for those in need in the community. Ask God what one new thing you will do this Fall. And listen for the answer. That's being ready and willing.

Let us pray.