Title: *Say what you mean; Mean what you say* Homecrest PC

Scripture: *James 1:17-27* and Mark 7:1-8, 17-239/2/18

How many of you remember seeing the TV commercial about the *Huntington Learning Center*, when a mother was screaming at her son for receiving another bad report card, and the child yelled back, *“I hate school. Do you think I want to fail? Mom, I say I would do better”.* Then the mother replied, *“Saying it and doing it are two different things!”* How many of you remember that?

This seems to be the exact message that writer of *James* is reminding us this morning concerning how we shall live out our everyday lives both ethically and morally. **There needs to be some kind of accountability and direct correlation of what we say and with the actions that follow**.

**As Christians, we must not only “talk the talk”, we must also “walk the talk” and “walk the walk”.** Often times, the church has been given a bad reputation that “*it is full of hypocrites and that the people don’t practice what they preach” or “their lives do not measure up to the message that Jesus taught?”* Obviously these are some generalizations of a few bad apples that ruin the reputation of the whole tree. But they should also raise our concerns of how we shall behave in terms of our everyday conducts. How do our actions and our lives reflect upon our faith?

Certainly we don’t need to look far in order to see examples of such human misbehaviors, allegations and charges. Just this past week, the head of the Roman Catholic Church – Pope Francis was visiting Ireland, he was being asked to comment upon the alleged cover-up of sexual abuses among many of the Roman Catholic priests of the past. This is just one of many current examples regarding how our conducts and our faith don’t quite often measure up…especially among those who are rich, famous, influential and powerful. Even among many of our leaders in churches or in governments have failed repeatedly and fallen from grace. They have NOT lived up to their callings as leaders and representatives of the people.

The writer of this letter of James, who was believed to be one of Jesus’s biological brothers, expressed his deep concerns over the people’s conducts and beliefs…how their words and actions must measure up with one another, or not…. Even though this short letter only contains 6 chapters, James was poignantly speaking his mind and telling it as it is. He was not afraid to speak up against his own brothers, while exposing the hypocrisy of those who failed to live up to the many virtues and conducts, as taught and mandated by Christ. James didn’t have to call them out by names but he challenged them to examine their own conducts and held them to be accountable. After all, ultimately one is being held accountable for his or her own actions with God. F Furthermore, James offered a series of practical advice (in verses 19 and 20), he called out for his fellow believers to *be* ***quick to listen****,* ***slow to speak*** *and* ***slow to anger****, for our anger does not produce God’s righteousness.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

I’m sure all of us have been angry before…some may become more easily angry or upset while some may be more tolerable. Some of us may be quick to point out the petty wrongs of others, while we fail to acknowledge our own and proclaim ourselves to be more righteous than the others. But as Jesus pointed out in one of his parables, as part of his Sermon on the Mount, that ***"we do not judge, so that we may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment we make, we will be judged, and the measure we give, will be the measure we get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?[[2]](#footnote-2)***

Keep in mind that **every time we point our fingers at somebody else, while two fingers are pointing in the other persons’ direction, the remaining three are pointing back to our own.** God gave us two ears, two sides of the brain, but only one mouth…meaning, we should listen and think through twice as much before we speak. Our actions and our faith do reflect off one another hand-in-hand, and it shows.

When was the last time you were in a disagreement or in conflict with someone? What were the circumstances? Who started it? Whose fault is it? Is it always the other person’s fault? How did it eventually get resolved…or not? Perhaps we are still holding grudges of the others. What efforts have YOU made in reconciling YOUR differences with others?

James wrote this letter to groups of believers who were scattered around the region. They were scattered partly because many were facing severe oppression and persecution by the Roman government due to their faith. It seems that faith and action were at odd when practicing one’s faith may very well jeopardize one’s own lives.

The context and the circumstances of James’ letter were obviously different from ours today. We are grateful to be living in a country where we can freely exercise our faith without fear of our lives, but **this freedom does come with a sense of responsibility that must not be ignore, abused, or compromised.**

Our genuine faith in Christ transforms our very lives and shapes us into who God created us to be. Everyday we are reminded to put our faith into action. We acknowledge that even though we may not live our lives so perfectly, reflective of our faith, nevertheless, as James put it, it IS out faith that would ultimately save us and bear us much fruits at the end. Faith without action is just words and empty promises.

In the Gospel lesson that we read earlier from *Mark*, we saw a group of Pharisees were quick in pointing out the petty wrongs among a few of Jesus’ disciples. The disciples were being accused of eating without properly washing their hands. Now I am certain that we have ALL done that before at some point… eating without washing hands. The Pharisees argued that it was not about the petty act of washing hand itself, but it was more about one’s disobedience to the law of God. The Pharisees were so caught up with obliging the laws and traditions while neglecting their own wrong-doings. They were quick in putting others’ conducts and characters under the microscope, accusing others of wrong-doings while neglecting to look at their own. It’s like a one-way mirror that can only see outside, but not seeing a reflection of themselves. These Pharisees claimed to be more righteous than all the others.

Jesus quickly turned this into a teaching moment for his disciples, saying that it’s not what goes into one’s body that defile you, but what come out of one’s body…through our words, our actions, and our thoughts. Don’t be so quick in placing judgment upon others, whereas what one really needs to do is to examine himself or herself. Judge not, or you will be judged. As Jesus said, *"For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." [[3]](#footnote-3)*

When we try to do things on our own, thinking that our decisions and our judgements are the best, using ungodly thoughts or behind personal motivation, we will most certainly fail. **We must yearn to seek the greater good and the will of others first rather than ourselves.**

This week, this country bid farewell to the late Senator John McCain, who was considered an honorable patriot who loved his country, dedicated his lifetime for service, and have earned the respects among all people across the political spectrum. Throughout his political career, he always made his effort to reach out to his political opponents, even if he disagreed with them. Often times he even defended his opponent and rebuked his own, for the sake of unity and welfare of the country.

In his final public message to his fellow Americans, McCain reminded all Americans to serve others first before ourselves. He wrote, ***"To be connected to America’s causes — liberty, equal justice, respect for the dignity of all people — brings happiness more sublime than life’s fleeting pleasures. Our identities and sense of worth are not circumscribed but enlarged by serving good causes bigger than ourselves."***

***"We weaken our greatness when we confuse our patriotism with tribal rivalries that have sown resentment and hatred and violence in all the corners of the globe. We weaken it when we hide behind walls rather than tear them down, when we doubt the power of our ideals, rather than trust them to be the great force for change they’ve always been."***

Regardless of one’s political affiliation, this country will dearly miss a good fellow citizen like John McCain, who was not afraid to speak with valiant courage, grace and reverence, even until his last days. Without fear, he not only “talk-the-talk”, but he also “walk-the-walk”, AND he “walk-the-talk” as well, while challenging the system of injustice for all and the abusive use of political power, personal privilege and authority by some.

**As God’s chosen and set-apart people in this world, we are being held to a higher moral and ethical standard…a standard that Christ has set so high for us to achieve, but not too high for us to strive for.** Through Christ, God has met us half-way through his work of reconciliation for ALL humankind. Christ has already done his work, while on the cross, but now we must also do ours. We have our roles and obligations to play to impact society and those around us. As the Apostle Peter encouraged us that “*we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

Later on, we will once again come before this table of grace and reconciliation. This table serves as a reminder of the work that Christ has done for us that bridged the eternal separation between God and us. It is a table of welcome, not set for those who are righteous but for those who are sinners in need of God’s grace and redemption. It is a table that is set for those who need to come…to come BACK to God, from a misguided fallen world.

This table is a sign of God’s compassion and embrace towards us, even when we do not deserve to be saved due to our sinful nature. We may not have practiced what we preach. We may have hurt others with our own slandered thoughts through our hearts and gossiping words out of our mouths. We may have put ourselves first before others and sometimes even before God. Lord, in your mercy, forgive us and sanctify us. Welcome us into your feasting table of joy and thanksgiving.

Friends, God has challenged us here today to examine our own spiritual and practical lives. **Do we live a life exhibiting Christ’s characters of humility, grace, compassion and justice towards ALL of God’s people? Do we exemplify Christ’s teachings through our thoughts, deeds, words, and prayers?**

**Say what we mean, and mean what we say! Don’t just talk the talk; but we must walk the talk as well!** To God be the glory.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *James 1:19-20* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Matthew 7:1-3* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Mark 7:21-23* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *1 Peter 2:9-10* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)