

Go & Do Likewise
Sunday, October 17, 2010
By Troy Pribnow

How many times have you seen people with Jesus fish on their cars flipping people the bird and driving all but defensively?

How many times have you seen someone wearing a cross yelling and swearing at their own children in public?

How many people wearing What Would Jesus Do? bracelets berating a cashier or restaurant server?

What would our hymn today sound like if we sang “And they will know we are Christians because we say so and that should be good enough”?

We all too often proclaim “God is great” while not allowing Him to act through us. Beyond claiming we are Christians, we need to show it.

In our epistle reading today, James warns that we should not claim faithfulness while simultaneously sinning or being indifferent to others. Jesus did not only heal those who were Jewish, he healed everyone in need. We cannot love our neighbors but then decide who our neighbors are. We do not choose our neighbors anymore than we choose our parents, siblings or other family members. In the grand sense of universality, we are all brothers. Sisters. Fathers. Mothers. Teachers. Healers. ***Neighbors.***

James is teaching us of three types of faith, but only one is the path to God. First he tells us of faith of the mind. This faith is the faith that people tend to hide behind. We know in our minds what the Bible says and what Jesus teaches us, but our actions speak otherwise. This is the crowd of “do as I say, not as I do” fame.

Our second type of faith comes from the passage: “Even the demons believe that God is one—and shudder.” This is a faith of the mind plus the heart. These people are aware of the Bible verses and what we as Christians ***should*** do, and are aware of it just enough to be afraid of God. Almost as if they know what the consequences of acting wrongly, yet not sure how to act in the right.

The last type of faith is the faith we must all strive to possess; a faith of the mind, heart ***and*** body; a faith of our will. A faith that lets our brothers and sisters know we are Christians without ourselves proclaiming it on our cars, wrists, necks or shouting it from the rooftops. All of these proclamations are in vain anyway.

God already knows who has that faith.

Abraham showed his faith of will by offering Isaac as a sacrifice. What would that scene from Genesis look like if Abraham had claimed faith but withheld his son?

In the book of Joshua, Rahab, a prostitute, showed her faith by aiding spies in Jericho. A woman who was committing who knows what sins by having the profession she did. A woman who, by usual accounts was going against God's laws, was an asset to the people of God. Because of her faith of will.

Faith without deeds is like having a car with no gas, or gas with no car. Well, if you were me, we *could* use the gas for a nice big bonfire, but *that* does not really fit my analogy. The car will sit in the driveway and rust away unless it has fuel. The fuel will grow stale and useless if not used. Let faith be the fuel in our good deeds.

Beyond performing deeds, ask yourself why you do them; is it for God's glory or for yours?"

Jesus teaches us in our gospel lesson today that loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is the greatest commandment, but next is that we love our neighbor as ourselves. This lesson goes hand-in-hand with what James says in today's reading.

Jesus does not tell us to love whomever we deem fit. He says to love our neighbor, *impartially*. I think that is one of the hardest things to do.

We are going to pass judgment whether we mean to or not. It seems so instantaneous at times that it is almost ingrained in us as a part of being human. We cannot let that snap judgment rule our lives, however. This is illustrated daily in our society.

I work with a Muslim man, named Rashid. Rashid and I make a lot of comparisons between our lives, relationships, cultures and, most importantly, our religions.

He and I are not really that different. We are both the same age, both know heartache and loss, both care greatly for our friends, both put our families first when they need our help, and are both troubled by what is happening in the world and more specifically the United States today.

Our religions are equally similar. We both have similar moral codes, similar rules about temptations, similar reasons for similar rites, and even pray to the same God. Allah is just the Arabic word for God, same as *Dios* in Spanish, *Dieu* in French or *Yahweh* in Hebrew. It is the same God as us, as Christ Jesus and of Abraham, Isaac and Rahab.

My intention here is not to become political, but to talk about tragedies that self-proclaimed Christians perform. I have heard debate from both sides of the aisle about the mosques in New York City, Tennessee and other places across the US and it really disturbs me the amount of persecution through which Muslims are going. There are people who can't tell you much about their own religion, but are telling us what Muslims believe.

America was founded by people fleeing religious persecution so they might be able to live according to what they believe and to do so in peace and without fear of persecution.

So why should we be so different now?

The point I want to make has nothing to do with how you feel about Muslims or politics. It is about being a Christian really means to me.

It is easy to talk with people who seem nice and who tend to think similarly to ourselves and who aren't "annoying." It is easy to talk about doing good deeds, but then walk by people in need. Being a Christian, to me, isn't about doing what is easy. It's about doing what is right in the eyes of our Lord and doing what needs to be done. We don't need to give money or things we don't have or will go in debt to get. We don't need to run ourselves ragged worrying about everyone while we let our homes, families or ourselves fall by the wayside. Sometimes all we need to do is care.

It's easy to judge. We let our politics, fears, insecurities, excuses and pride get in the way of our deeds. If we can't physically help someone, we can learn, teach and practice tolerance, grace, peace and love. When we see people whom we are judging we need to take one moment and remember, no matter what that person appears to be to us, in God's eyes we are all the same. As long as we have a breath in our bodies and they have a breath in theirs, we have opportunities to sin and they have opportunities to repent.

How different would our world look if we saw people through the eyes of God?

We are by no means perfect, only God is perfect. We are merely humans. We have human desires, emotions, temptations, strength and faith.

Jesus concludes the parable of the Good Samaritan with "Go and ***DO*** likewise." Not, "go and talk about doing likewise and tell others what ***THEY*** should do"

There is a commercial currently running on TV where two men, one a distributor of Coke Zero and the other of Pepsi Max, are sitting next to each other at a diner. The Coke Zero man tries a can of Pepsi Max and likes it, while he is drinking; the Pepsi Max guy pulls his camera phone out. When asked what he is doing, he responds "YouTube!" The Coke Zero man instantly gets an expression of fear and anger at realizing the consequences of people seeing that video. The next thing we see is the Pepsi Max man flying through the window of the diner.

I admit, that ad makes me laugh when I see it, but it also makes me think.

We worry about getting caught by police, friends, family members, and to some extent, by everyone in society, but not as much by God. Why not? Are we not more likely to be caught by God than by our bosses or family?

I know that God forgives and is merciful, but I don't believe that is what people are thinking. It seems that God is usually the last thing on people's minds when are doing something "wrong." I also don't believe that God being merciful and forgiving is a "free pass" to do what we want and repent later.

Repentance ***is***, however, a very necessary tool for us. Jesus taught forgiveness during His whole life. That is because the God of Jesus, who is also our God, is forgiving. In order to

repent to God, we must, and this is the hard part, **recognize and admit** our sins and shortcomings.

We will not just be granted the tools, faith and knowledge we need, but God gives us the **opportunity** to grow in The Spirit. It is our choice each minute of each day to see, recognize and act on the opportunities God has set on each of our paths.

I have spent most of my life living for myself. I have also spent those same years battling loneliness, depression and anxiety. When I started coming back to church about a year ago, I was nervous and anxious. But everyone here treated me as though I had never left. It was not even in my depth of imagining that I would be back every Sunday. It was very much a casual thing.

As I came to feel comfortable, I so began to feel the need to be part of the church. I also started reading daily devotionals and the bible verses. That began my transformation, which I can attribute to God, who was working through my mom. I began to be active in the church as well as other programs; including asking for this opportunity to preach to you today and also experiencing a call to service from God.

The more I became involved with supporting the church and helping others, the better I felt about myself. Depression and anxiety aren't gone, but are most definitely manageable. Loneliness has been replaced by being busy and surrounded by friends and a sense of purpose.

I know through the different teams with which I have helped, that our church family is definitely in the spirit of helping others when we can, and I applaud everyone of your efforts. To see someone who cares and will pray and help, you only need look to the pew next to you. And, as Jesus said, go and **do** likewise.

Let us pray

Gracious God, thank you for the many blessings that you shower us with each and every day. While we may not be able to help everyone with money or time, please teach us to give them the same love and tolerance that you give to us. Give us the vision to see the opportunities you present to us and the strength to act the way we know we should. Amen

Hymns – *“They Will Know We Are Christians”* *“Pass It On”*

Old Testament Reading – Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Epistle Reading – James 2:8-26

Gospel Reading – Mark 12:20-32