

Text: Isaiah 58:3-9a**Theme: Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk**

I am often amazed that although time and technology separate us from Bible times, not much else has changed. People are the same today at 2500 years ago when Isaiah lived. We see that in our text. People often speak the right words, but their actions tell a different story. Today it might be an environmental activist, who preaches that we need to save energy, but they fly around the world in their private jet or use more electricity in a month in their mansions than most of us do in a year. It might be a company that encourages us to buy from them because they are socially conscience, but then we find out that they don't treat their workers well. It's the charities where the majority of the income goes to outrageous salaries for administrators or even churches in which morality is preached, but the leaders are caught in horrible acts. In these verses Isaiah shows that God hates it when we just talk the talk. God desires that we also walk the walk in the light of our Savior.

I. It is easy and tempting to just talk the talk.

A. Israel fell into that temptation. They appeared to be very religious at times. If they wanted something from God, they would fast and humble themselves before the Lord. They hoped that God would see their piety and reward them with whatever they desired.

However, it was only outward. As they fasted, they oppressed their workers. Even their fasting was done, so that God would give them pleasure in some way. They would have arguments and fights, even as they fasted. They did not live as the holy people that God called them to be. They might have looked pious on the outside, but their hearts were full of greed and malice.

It's still easy for us to fall into that temptation. It tempting to think that there is a part of us that is religious and another part, which follows the wicked ways of the world. Somehow, we think that it is fine that we have this dual personality. We want God to notice all the good things that we do for Him. We come to worship. We have devotions and read our Bibles. We always pray before we eat. That is not to say that there is anything wrong with any of these things. In Isaiah's time there was nothing wrong with fasting or wearing sackcloth.

But you can't look and sound Christian on the one hand and live in sin on the other hand. We don't do things for God so that He will reward us and give us what we want. As Christians God calls us to love and serve those whom we have been given authority over, not to oppress them. Our thoughts for other people should be kind, compassionate, and forgiving, not filled with malice and hatred. It is so easy to think that we can walk in the sinful ways of the world on the one hand and think that God should bless us when we say the right words.

II. It's much harder to walk the walk.

A. God told Israel what He expected of them. He wanted them to loosen the bond of wickedness, and to break oppression. He desired that they shared their bread with the hungry and even take the homeless into their homes. They were to clothe those who lacked sufficient clothing. They were also not to turn away from their own flesh and blood, but to take care of their children, aged parents and other family. God gave them these very concrete examples of how they were to walk the walk.

Some of them are very difficult things – to stand with those who are oppressed, to give of what you have for those who are poor, to sacrifice for ailing members of your family, and the most difficult to take in the homeless.

But that is exactly what it means to walk the walk. Walking with Jesus means that we sacrifice for one another. It is as when Jesus began to wash His disciples' feet. He said that the Son of Man came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. He sought the sinners and the outcasts. He spoke up for those who were wrongly accused. Those acts are not always admired. It was when He defended the woman who anointed His feet, that pushed Judas over the edge. It was that event that caused Judas to go to the chief priests to betray Jesus.

It is not easy to walk with Jesus. It means to stand up for and with people who don't have a voice from those children in the womb, to the poor, to the most aged among us. It is to sacrifice for our families. It is sharing with those who are in need. To walk the Christian walk is to be kind, compassionate and forgiving as God has forgiven us in Christ. It is to have hearts that have been changed from selfish hearts to gracious and merciful hearts.

III. It is by God's grace that we can walk the walk.

It comes from faith in God's graciousness to us. As Christians we don't see God as someone whom we can manipulate because we threw him a couple of trinkets. The Israelites thought that if they fasted and put on sackcloth every now and then, God should take notice and give them what they wanted. God doesn't need anything from us. If we think that our works can sway him, it is like giving a few trinkets to a rich person, hoping that they will give us what we want. God's goodness and mercy come to us simply because He is gracious. We don't deserve anything good from God. Yet, while we were still sinners Christ died for us. He wants us to simply believe that He loves us and that Christ has redeemed us from our sins. We do not try to earn God's favor. We thank God that He has been gracious to us and given us His own Son to take away our sins. We were the poor and downtrodden, and God came to rescue us. Christ gave up everything in order to save us. We praise Him, not to earn His favor, but in thanksgiving for all that He has done for us.

As Christians we cannot help but to follow in the way of our Savior. In Ephesians 5 Paul writes, *"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us."* Jesus says in our gospel lesson that we are the light of the world, *"Let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* The good works that we do as Christians are simply the fruit of faith in God's great love for us.

It is tempting to talk the talk, to sound pious and religious so that God and other people will take notice of us and praise us. But God wants us to walk the walk. We walk with Jesus as we trust in His grace for us, and follow that example as we love one another as He has loved us. By God's grace may we all be among those who walk the walk of faith in Christ. Amen.

Prayer of the Church
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
9 February 2020

Give counsel and aid, O Lord, for Your people cry to You in weakness and in need. Bless and prosper Your Church according to Your purpose, that she may be salt and light, giving bold witness to the redemption You have provided in Jesus Christ and giving shape to Your love by showing compassion to all in need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give to those who suffer for the sake of Your name and to those threatened with martyrdom the courage of Your good Spirit and the strength to be steadfast in the hour of trial. Deliver us from all temptation to compromise Your truth or depart from Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give peace to our nation, and give Your blessing to Donald, our president; _____, our governor; and all those elected and appointed to governmental service. Give wisdom to all judges and magistrates, and give protection to the firefighters, police and emergency personnel who labor on our behalf. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give Your blessing to the home, to husbands and wives, to the children in their care, and to the extended family. Guide them to serve each other in love, and make their homes places of blessing and peace where Your Word is spoken, forgiveness is shown, and love is demonstrated in word and in deed. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give healing to the sick, relief to the suffering, comfort to the grieving, and peace to the dying [*especially _____*]. According to Your will, deliver them from their afflictions, sustain them in their struggles, and give them patience in their adversities. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give to Your people a grateful heart, that we may honor You with the firstfruits of our labors, bring You the tithes and offerings of our hands, and use wisely all that You entrust into our care. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands we commend...