

Mark 8:27-38/Sept. 12, 2021 – God’s Work Our Hands Day

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, on Tuesday night I just happened to catch Lester Holt on the nightly news talking to the fire chief in New York City. As you well know, yesterday was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9-11. All this past week news shows have been doing specials on the events of that very tragic day.

On Tuesday, the story was about all of the fire fighters who had rushed into the twin towers in New York City. The chief, who one of those fire fighters who was on the ground that day, was asked about these heroes, and he said – they weren’t heroes. They were fire fighters and they were doing what they were trained to do.

Any other firefighter would have done the same thing. Just because they died doesn’t make them a hero. They were just caught up in something much bigger than themselves and that happened to be the place where they died.

We may call these men and women heroes, but the chief called them friends and fellow fire fighters.

That’s interesting, right? Depending on how you know someone will determine what you say about them – about who you say they are. Are they heroes or are they friends?

It seems to me that a hero is perhaps someone distant who we do not know who puts their life on the line for us. A friend on the other hand is someone with whom we have a closer relationship. Someone we work with, perhaps for a greater good, or perhaps someone we just enjoy playing cards with.

I guess a hero could be a family member or a friend if they have saved our life in some way. But, to me, it just seems that a hero is somehow different than a friend. The relationship is different. They are somehow far removed on a higher plain than a friend is.

What do you think?

Perhaps we can look at Jesus the same way – Jesus on the cross – dying for us - hero. Jesus with us as we go out into the world to serve others – friend. In chapter 15 of John, Jesus says we are his friends. Jesus says, when we do God’s will we are his friends, his co-workers, fellow “fire-fighters” if you will.

What do you think? Who would you say Jesus is? Hero or friend?

This is a conversation that came up as Jesus was walking with his disciples in the Gentile area of Caesarea Philippi. First he asked – who do other people say that I am. And then he asks Peter – who do you say that I am?

And it’s interesting that it happens near a city named for a Caesar. Philip was said to be King and Philip named this city after the one who was said to be the emperor.

So, Jesus asks Peter - who do you say that I am in the midst of all of these royal titles? And here we get Peter’s confession - that Jesus is the Messiah – the Christ – the anointed one from God – the one they have been expecting to free them from oppression for a very long time.

Now there is some speculation as to why Jesus tells Peter not to say that he is the Messiah. 1 – “them’s fighting words” in the presence of Gentiles. If the Roman’s heard such talk, they would be out to kill Jesus as an insurrectionist. 2 – there is also this understanding of the Messianic secret in Mark – that in Mark Jesus never wants anyone to know who he really is.

But, Jesus himself never ever says he is the Messiah in Mark. Even when asked if he is, he stays completely silent. It’s never a title he uses.

Jesus instead calls himself the Son of Man, which refers back to the book of Daniel and the one who is seen to be with God in heaven.

So, after Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus tells Peter that he, Jesus, must be killed, Peter becomes quite agitated. That is not what the Messiah is supposed to do. The Messiah supposed to kill not be killed.

At this point, Peter still has the no idea who Jesus really is. It won't be until after the resurrection that any of the disciples have any idea that Jesus isn't the Messiah. He is the Lord!

And if you go back and read through Mark you'll notice that after Peter's confession and Jesus' proclamation that he must be killed, it is only those who are against Jesus that call him Messiah, and they use it in a very ironic kind of way, dripping with disdain.

So, who do you say Jesus is?

Today both Jews and Muslims say that Jesus is a prophet. A really good prophet, but nothing more. Gandhi said that Jesus was a good role model. Some say Jesus just was some guy that lived a couple of thousand years ago who was totally misunderstood.

Who do you say that Jesus is? And more importantly – what difference does it make in the world?

What we say with our tongues along with the actions that follow those words does make a difference in the world. They, together, are our testimony. They are who we say Jesus is.

If we say one thing and do the opposite, it means that we do not actually believe the words we speak and no one will take us seriously.

If we say, Jesus is love and our Lord, the ruler of our lives, and we are hateful to others, that is not good testimony.

So, if we say Jesus is love and our Lord, how is that reflected in our lives? If we say, Jesus is God's mercy personified and he is our Lord, how is that reflected in the world?

If we say, Jesus is our Savior and Lord, what does that mean in our day to day lives and to the people we meet on the street?

Our words and our actions should go hand in hand, they should be in harmony with one another.

James points out in his letter, what we say matters. And as my parents would say – how we say it matters as well. Do we say one thing and behave totally opposite of what we proclaim? Sure – sometimes we do. That's why we have confession and forgiveness. That's why we apologize when we've been a puke.

Words matter, because the Word matters – Jesus the Word of God.

So, it's not just what we say in this building that matters, but how the Word and these words, are carried out into the world.

And so today we celebrate God's Work Our Hands Sunday as we remember our call to say who Jesus is and reflect it in our actions. we behave as if what we say matters, and it does.

So, today we will bless these school supplies and snacks for the sake of the children at Running Creek elementary. With this offering to God, we are saying in the world that God cares about children, especially children who need help. We say Jesus is proof of God's love, grace, and mercy in both our words and actions.

And then we'll go out onto the paths of Elizabeth to pick up trash. With this offering of our time and bodies, we are saying to the world that God cares about all of creation. God cares that fish have clean water, that plants grow better without garbage on them, and that people have a nice place to enjoy what God has created.

What we say about Jesus is reflected in what we do in the world and our vocation is to take the love of God as known in Christ Jesus our Lord out into the world. As God has come to us in Jesus, so we go out to our friends, family, and perfect strangers.

It's not that we are some kind of heroes. It's simply what we have been called into this work by the Holy Spirit, and because of the Spirit, we say that Jesus Christ is our Lord.

His ways are our ways. So we take up our cross and join him in his work of proclaiming God's love, grace, peace, and mercy out in the world, because that is what the cross says about God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.