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If you grew up with sisters or brothers today's Gospel makes perfect sense. Was there not always one sister or brother who, when asked by your parents to do something, always responded sweetly, saying "Sure, I'll do that" and then did just what he/she pleased. And the other brother or sister who would whine, "Do I have to" or "I'll do it tomorrow" or "I don't want to". And then eventually did what was asked albeit grudgingly but it was done.

In today's gospel Jesus tells the parable of two sons who say one thing and then does another. Asked by the father to go and work in the vineyard the first son said no but later reconsidered his decision and did the work. The second son, on the other hand, politely said yes to the father but failed to do the work.

Jesus told this parable to acknowledge a basic truth which is there is a little bit of both brothers in us. Because all of us at times say yes and don't do anything and there are other times we say no but reconsider and do what we've been asked. But the parable was also told to prod us to realize that to live a life of faith doesn't mean looking for the easy way out - it doesn't mean saying yes and then not doing anything.

It is one thing to profess faith and to speak with fervent religiosity. It is quite another to live one's faith. More than anything we say, more than any words mouthed, it is the service we offer and the love that we share which truly proclaims our love for God and our discipleship of Jesus. How we live and act; how we serve and how we love not what we say gives expression to our belief and our trust in God. We not only have to talk the talk, we must also walk the walk.

Throughout his life, Jesus tried to teach us that while our words matter--our actions also matter. He tried to show us that while our past may be important--it's what we do today and tomorrow that counts. The woman who turned away from prostitution... The tax collector who repaid his victims... The scrupulous young man, who learned the meaning of mercy... These were people who not only heard but lived the message. They were people who, despite the mistakes of the past, made the message of Jesus a part of their future.

But too often we like to keep Jesus out on the periphery — someone who we hear stories about on Sunday when we go to church. Someone we sing hymns about. Someone we mention in our prayers, but is not at the center of our lives. It is easy to stand up and affirm our belief in Christ with everyone else on a Sunday morning in church but by noon that affirmation is beginning to fade, by 4 o'clock in the afternoon it is almost gone, and by Monday morning we've forgotten everything that we have said, and we are ready to live the rest of the week as if Christ does not exist.

Why is that? Is it because if we're really listening, the Christian message can be pretty shocking? Because it suggests that sitting piously in church on Sunday may be less important to God than the choices we make on Tuesday. It suggests that talking about poverty and worrying about justice and feeling sorry for the broken and the wounded may not be what God has in mind. Talking, worrying and feeling sorry doesn't change anything.

Do we not do anything because to enter into a dialogue with our Christian tradition and struggle with its meaning scares us that it might in fact change our whole lives? Does it not scare us that to make the decision that we need to change and put

God at the center of our lives, we must live out that decision in our daily lives. It is not a one-time event. Simply because we profess our faith in Christ does not mean that we follow the path of discipleship the rest of our lives. It is a daily moment by moment decision. It requires constant reexamination and determination. So the gospel says to live a life of faith doesn't mean looking for the easy way out - it doesn't mean saying yes and then not doing anything. It requires us to get out in that field to work.

If you want to know what a person really values, don't listen to their words - look at their life. Their actions will show you who they really are, what's really important to them, who they really are inside. It's just like an x-ray. X-rays enable the doctor to see what's inside us. Our actions are the x-rays that show us and others who we really are inside. It is important that our words and actions match.

Let me tell you a story that was told by a woman who had been raised in the deep South, and considered herself to be a solid compassionate Christian amidst the racial prejudices that were very much a part of her upbringing. The story took place in the 1960's. She wrote:

A week after my son started first grade, he came home with the news that Roger, the only African American in the class, was his playground partner. I swallowed and said, "That's nice. How long before someone else gets him for a partner?"

"Oh, I've got him for good," replied Billy. In another week, I had news that Billy had asked if Roger could be his desk partner. Unless you were born and reared in the Deep South, in the 50's and 60's as I was, you cannot know what this means. I went for an appointment with the teacher. She met me with tired cynical eyes.

"Well, I suppose you want a new desk partner for your child, too," she said. "Can you wait a few minutes? I have another mother coming in right now." I looked up to see a woman my age. My heart raced as I realized she must be Roger's mother. She had a quiet dignity and much poise, but neither trait could cover the anxiety I heard in her questions: "How's Roger doing? I hope he is keeping up with the other children? If he isn't, just let me know."

She hesitated as she made herself ask, "Is he giving you any trouble of any kind? I mean, what with his having to change desks so much?"

I felt the terrible tension in her, for she knew the answer. But I was proud of that first-grade teacher for her gentle reply: "No, Roger is not giving me any trouble. I try to move all the children around the first few weeks until each has just the right partner."

I introduced myself and said that my son was to be Roger's new partner and I hoped they would like each other. Even then I knew it was only a surface wish, not a deep-felt one. But it helped her, I could see.

Twice Roger invited Billy to come home with him, but I found excuses. Then came the heartache that I will always remember. On my birthday Billy came home from school with a piece of paper folded into a very small square. Unfolding it, I found three flowers and "Happy Birthday" crayoned on the paper and a nickel.

"That's from Roger," said Billy. "It's his milk money. When I said today was your birthday, he made me bring it to you. He said you are his friend, because you're the only mother who didn't make him get another desk partner."

I'm sure that mother would be the first to agree that she was saying "yes" but doing "no". How often are we like that mother? How often do we say the right words, without meaning them? How often do we take the name of Christ with so little regard

for what that means? Do you say that you don't love others and then do, or do you say that you love others and then don't? Do you say "no and then yes" or "yes and then no"?

We say we are Christians, but how do we know? How do others know? We aren't perfect, but we are definitely called to be different. As comedian Stephen Colbert put it, "Either we've got to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that he commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition; and then admit that we just don't want to do it."

Jesus opposed all forms of religion that stop at empty words and all forms of piety that don't move us into the world of concrete action on behalf of justice, mercy, equality, love, and compassion. Jesus doesn't need Christians that flicker to life on Sunday morning, but then fade out between Monday and Saturday. In other words, if we choose not to walk the walk, then we are just as bad as the chief priests and elders Jesus encountered.

Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments". Don't just tell me you love me. Let me see you out there in the field - showing your love in your home, on your job, in your marriage, with your neighbors, in your attitudes, in your words, in your actions.

We can know all the right words to say but nothing speaks louder than God seeing us in the field. May we choose to live in God's wide loving margin of grace and have the courage to do something about it. Amen.