

“The Works That I Do”
Acts 9:36-42; John 10:25-28

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Some of you... whom I haven’t had a discussion about the subject with... may wonder what all of these bracelets on my wrist are about. Is it because, to borrow from the Carole King song, ‘I’m so vain?’ NO, it’s not about ‘me,’ but about what each one of these represent. Wheels of Hope (St. Nicholas Ctr for children). Catholic Charities (given by oldest granddaughter). Ainsley’s Angels. (allows those with disabilities to participate in road races). MyRunMyReason (affirms whatever rationale for running/exercise). Evergreen Life Services (group homes for those with developmental disabilities). Bright green one (actually an indoor amusement ‘park,’ but mainly because a young grandchild, ca 5 y.o. at the time, gave it to me for my birthday).

I wear these not for ‘self-adornment,’ but the same reason that most every polo shirt I own has some logo on it (FPC, LSU, McNeese, Navy, Montreat, etc.): that **if you believe in something enough to be a part of it, you should be willing to SHOW it.** I would hazard to say that every one of you has multiple items of clothing, lapel pins, or other ‘paraphernalia,’ that has the name of a business, school, or civic organization on it. Maybe even right now...

And so, if we are so willing to allow ourselves to be identified with a university, a civic or business organization, how much MORE should we be willing to bear public witness to the FAITH ‘organization’ we belong to? And I don’t simply mean our particular ‘holy huddle’ of F.P.C. I am referring to the ‘universal’ body of believers in Jesus Christ... the body of Christ known as His **CHURCH.** What ‘symbols’ of your faith in Christ might YOU ‘wear’ to be seen...?

Now, I am not speaking exclusively of shirts, pins, jewelry, or bumper stickers. For one, those can be a ‘two-edged sword.’ Have you ever had someone cut you off in traffic, nearly taking your bumper off, causing you to slam on your brakes... and about the time you’re ready to pound on your horn, or question their lineage with a ‘finger salute,’ there you see on their trunk a big ‘FISH’ symbol. One that perhaps matches one on your OWN car. That’s the thing about being easily **identified** with a particular group... one’s behavior reflects ON that group. And makes you an ‘easy target’ for criticism of that group... kind of like the grief I get when LSU loses... or gets bad PR...

But it's much more than simply those 'symbolic' representations of our faith that are important. It's our ACTIONS. You know... as in, "Actions... speak louder... than words." You may recall the words of Jesus that I just read: ***"I have told you, and you do not believe. The WORKS that I DO in my Father's name testify to me..."*** (John 10:25) I can 'speak a sermon' all I want, but it is only as I 'LIVE that sermon' that it really has truth. You and I are called to READ the Bible, for sure... but more importantly, we are to BE the Bible; for our lives are indeed the only Bible that some will ever read. God's Holy Word only has its optimal POWER as you and I put into practice what we preach...

In our Acts passage, it was **Peter** who demonstrated God's full **power** by **practicing** what he had been called to **preach**. For one, he responded to the needs of others. He showed **COMPASSION!** When those friends and fellow disciples of Tabitha showed up at Peter's doorstep and said ***"Please come,"*** it says that ***"Peter got up and went with them."*** (Acts 9:39) No hesitation. No asking for details, assessing the situation before responding. No consideration for his personal 'inconvenience.' What were those 'words' of Jesus? ***"Love your neighbor as yourself."*** (Mt. 22:39)

Peter demonstrated his faith in Christ, his desire to **show** the same love for neighbor that Christ did by responding, unconditionally. Peter showed his faith not only in words, but by his ACTIONS.

And what did he do when he got there? Take one look at the still, motionless body of his sister-in-Christ and say, 'I'm sorry. Nothing I can do. So sorry for your loss.'? NO. We read that ***"Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed."*** (Acts 9:40)

Peter remembered the example of his Lord Jesus, and all those times that Jesus went off by himself to pray. Peter 'cleared the *room*' so that he might 'clear his *head*.' He knew that he must seek the counsel of the "only wise God" as to what to do. Not as a public spectacle, to call attention to himself, but to be in that quiet place where he could be SURE that the 'small still voice' he was hearing was God's, and not his own. In being mindful of his own human weakness, and the need to call upon the strength of God, perhaps Peter remembered some words of Jesus to him right before he would go out and three-times deny his Lord:

“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back (to me), strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:32)

Peter knew, both by Jesus’ words AND deeds, how important **prayer** was, and how Jesus had continued to **pray** FOR him and **believe** IN him. A TRUST that was to be ‘repaid’... after ‘turning back’ to Jesus... by strengthening his brothers and sisters in Christ. In following Jesus’ example in prayer, Peter showed his faith not only in words, but by his ACTIONS.

It was after this time of heartfelt, intense, discerning prayer that Peter was given his answer on what to do. For it says that ***“He turned to the body and said, ‘Tabitha, get up!’”*** (Acts 9:40) And that, upon speaking this ‘simple’ command, ***“She opened her eyes... she sat up...(and) He gave her his hand and helped her up. ...He showed her to be alive.”*** (9:40-41)

Peter, in his **compassion** for **people**... his **devotion** to **prayer**... his **faith** in **God**... was given the same resurrection power that brought Jesus through death to life. By living out Christ’s example to him, the news of this miracle spread throughout the land... ***“and many believed in the Lord.”*** (Acts 9:42) People who were doubtful of what they had *heard* about Jesus came to believe in Him... because Peter showed his faith not only in words, but by his ACTIONS.

As we consider PETER’s example to us... of what the ‘rock’ on which the church was built has to say to us, current ‘rock-heads’ that we be... there are certainly ‘take-aways’ for us to learn from. For **one**, the importance of **compassion** for others: To not judge, but **listen**; to not retreat, but **respond**; to not turn away from others’ needs, but to **turn toward** them.

And a **second** is the vital nature of **prayer**. Prayer that is to be a natural habit for us, as it was for Jesus, especially in the most UN-natural of situations. Prayer that can best come in our ‘quiet place,’ away from distractions, and not done to be seen by man, but heard by God. Prayer that guides us in ‘the way we should go’...

Which brings us to that last one. **Compassion**, check. **Prayer**, roger that. But bringing another human being back to life? Whoa. Now THAT’s a pretty tall order, wouldn’t you say? Talk about ‘above my *pay grade!*’ Peter, one of the original disciples of Jesus, who was given much authority by his “Teacher,” that’s one thing... but you and me? That sure sounds more like Jesus-level stuff, wouldn’t you say...?

Well, Jesus had some words to us on this subject of what should or shouldn't be in our 'wheelhouse': ***"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."*** (John 14:12) Because Jesus has 'left the house' to be with His 'DAD,' He has given us the 'keys to the car!' By virtue of our belief in Him, the very Son of God has said that we will do the very things He did while on earth... and not only that, even "GREATER" things! He goes on to say, in the very next verse, ***"I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."*** (John 14:13) We ask... in Christ's name... and He will do it. Hmmm... pretty incredible. Sounds too good to be true... *'impossible,'* if you will...

Also relative to the power of prayer and healing, there is actually a book by that same name, ***"The Impossible."*** You may have heard of the film based on that book, entitled ***"Breakthrough."*** It is based on the true story of a 14 y.o. boy who falls through the ice on a Missouri river and is submerged for over **15** minutes. After attempts to resuscitate him in the ambulance and hospital fail, his mother is allowed to come in and tell him goodbye. Through the fierce prayer of his mother over his lifeless body, pleading with the Holy Spirit not to let her son die, a weak pulse begins to register. And over the course of the next few weeks... amidst many tears, humble repentance, and fervent prayers by friends, family, church and school, the boy regains consciousness and goes on to make a complete recovery.

This movie is a shining example of what we have considered today. Of **Compassion**. Of **Prayer**. Of how we mere mortals can yet be **empowered by God** to do the **same miracles** of **healing** and 'resurrection' that Jesus did. But what that movie also addressed in a real way was how a family that was blessed with such a miracle dealt with people who had NOT had such a blessing from God... Those equally faithful followers of God who had prayed the same prayers for healing and NOT had them answered. It begged the question of how we are to bring **comfort** and **encouragement** to those who do NOT receive the answer to prayer that they sought...

The truth is that you and I always have the power of healing at our fingertips. And on our lips. And in our eyes. As Peter did. When he went to God in prayer, it was revealed to him that Tabitha could rise and live again. But if she had not, then Peter would have used the same

life-giving words of hope and encouragement to those mourning her loss. In the same way that we are to speak LIFE to others... no matter the circumstances. For as Paul said, ***"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."*** (1 Cor. 15:19) The example of resurrection hope that Jesus **spoke**, and **lived**, was well-expressed in those words of John's Gospel: ***"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand."*** (John 10:27-28)

May your life, and mine, bear witness to this truth. That the same 'shepherd' who cares for us calls us to do the same for others. Through our example to other 'sheep'... in **word and deed**... may the hurting be assured that these words of Jesus are to them as well: 'Hear my voice. I know you. Follow me. For I give you eternal life, and you will never die. No one can snatch you out of my hand.' The same Jesus who says to you and me: 'The works that I do... are what YOU are to do...'