

## ***TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST***

***Zechariah 7:1-10, Luke 20:27-38***

Put Your Life Where Your Prayers Are! Practice what you preach. Put your money where your mouth is. All these expressions emphasize the importance of putting actions behind our words. They are different ways of saying, “Show me you really believe what you say”. We all know people who makes a lot of claims and we wonder if they can live up them.

People wonder the same thing about the church. We talk about grace, mercy and power from above and new life. People hear what we say but they don’t know if they can trust us. They look to see if our lives clearly show faith, power and, love, mercy and grace. Most of the time they look at Christians and don’t see those things.

God’s people have always talked a good game, but they did not always deliver. There has always been a portion of God’s people, usually the majority, who spoke empty words and meaningless promises that they didn’t really believe.

The people of Bethel who came to the prophet Zechariah talked a good game. They sounded religious, but they really didn’t care for God. Their words were empty. Bethel had set up its own temple; they really didn’t care about the temple in Jerusalem. They spoke of fasting and prayer, but they didn’t back it up with love and justice.

Even in Jesus’ day God's people spoke with empty words. The Sadducees came to Jesus to ask him a theological question.

“According to God’s law if a man dies and his wife has had no children, then his brother must marry her to give her children that can care for her. Now, if a woman, by this law, married seven brothers, who will be her husband in heaven?” The Sadducees asked the question because they didn’t believe in the resurrection or life after death, that’s why they were so sad, you see. The Sad-you-sees just wanted Jesus to say that there was no afterlife. They talked about the living God, but they couldn’t accept that God could bring them back to life. All their study, prayer and sacrifice was empty because they didn’t really believe God had power over life, the power to defeat death. God speaks words of power, but many times God’s people repeat those words with hollow voices of faithlessness.

What was God’s response to these empty words? To the people of Bethel the Word of the Lord came through Zechariah. “You don’t fast for me, you fast to make yourselves look good. You and your ancestors say they reverence me, but they disrespect my commandments. Don’t worry about fasts. Instead seek justice and mercy. Care for the powerless and love your neighbors”.

To the Sadducees, Jesus, the Son of God spoke. The people of this world live their lives in this world. But God’s people are different. They are children of the living God. They shall not die. God is the God of the living, not the dead. So if we believe in the living God, believe in the life God gives.

God said, “Put your life where your prayers are”. In other words, “demonstrate through your actions that you believe what you say. Put up or shut up! Don’t say you believe in the living God and then deny the new life that God offers. Don’t pay false tribute to God’s holy temple and then defile God’s holy law of love. Practice what you preach. Live what you pray. Then your

prayers and words will mean something”.

And God’s people today come to God. We pay tribute and lift up prayers and we sing songs. We sing of God’s amazing grace that saved a wretch like me, but then we find it hard to forgive a brother or sister who has fallen. Or perhaps we claim the truth of God’s love as revealed in the Bible, but then we fail to speak against the sins and injustices of the world around us.

We can probably imagine God leaning back on that heavenly throne and signing deeply. And, in a voice of soft thunder God says, “All that is empty and meaningless. If you really believed in amazing grace you would show that grace to others. If you really believed in the truth of my word you would willingly speak it to all you meet. If you really believed that I give new life, you would act like people who are alive. God’s people today still speak empty words.

In the mean time people are still watching us Christians. Those who do not yet believe are listening to our words. They hear a lot of words. They hear us speak of new life in Christ. They hear us speak of the power of the living God. They hear us speak of divine justice and mercy and love. And they say, “Put you money where your mouth is”. What these people are saying to us as the church, show us what you really have.

But instead of showing them hope, we show them despair. Instead of showing them faith in God’s power, we demonstrate doubt that God can save us. Instead of justice, we show injustice, instead of mercy we judge, and instead of loving we hate. Instead of showing them that God hears our prayers, we act like prayer is meaningless.

We are all guilty of talking a good game. God doesn’t want our empty words. God wants our committed lives. Let us show the world that our words of resurrection are true. Let’s demonstrate

our faith in God's forgiveness, by confessing that we have not always practiced what we preach. Let's demonstrate God's power by asking God to help us to live the words of new life that we speak. Let's dedicate ourselves to loving the unlovable, to freeing the oppressed, and to comforting the distraught. Let's live what we pray, then our prayers will really mean something.

**AMEN.**