

His actions spoke louder than his words. The situation did not lend itself to words. He simply walked into the room, went over to the family and put his hand on their shoulders. His hand stayed there, supporting, comforting, and no words were spoken. His hand said, "I am here." Nothing else was needed. We often forget how our actions speak louder than our words. **It was in Antioch that they were first called Christians.**

I thought of another city as I read this story in Acts: Nineveh. I see some similarity in the two stories shared this morning. They are cities where action spoke louder than words. Nineveh is probably the city most recognize. It has something to do with the story of Jonah. You know Jonah—he was called by God to go to this great Gentile city, and being human he headed off in the other direction. It took a storm and a great fish to bring him to his senses and get him back on the right course. The second time God says, "Go," he responds. He storms through Nineveh, a city so large it took three days to walk through. Can you hear him? "You're doomed." "Tough luck." "Forty days and good-bye."

However a strange thing happens. People begin to hear his message. They repent from their ways and begin to *take action* in hopes of changing God's mind. Even the king gets in the act. He does not know if God will repent but he will do everything he can to work towards that end. He orders a mandatory fast for everyone in Nineveh, even the animals. Now have you ever tried to stop an animal from eating or drinking? We were in an elephant camp in Thailand and the elephant trainers came down the path and told us to stand to one side as it was time for the elephants to go to the river. There was one woman who apparently thought she had power over the elephants so she stood in their path with her camera ready. She did not expect the elephants to "charge" the water! It was only by someone pulling her back that she was kept from being trampled. The people of Nineveh obeyed and the city was saved!

Stephen has been stoned to death and the church is in turmoil. It is being scattered around the region and its story is being shared. Its story is being shared mostly with other Jewish people, except in Antioch. It is in Antioch that a few brave souls begin sharing the message with the Gentile population. As a result of this sharing the Gentile church begins to take shape. News of this reaches Jerusalem and they dispatch Barnabas to assess the situation. He discovers the news is true and there is a great need for discipleship. He goes to Tarsus to find a man named Saul, a staunch Jewish supporter recently converted to Christ, to help him disciple the Gentiles. Something happens in Antioch—"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Why? The literal translation of the Greek is: "Those of the household of Christ." Now, how do you know who is a part of what household? We may get in trouble for not knowing family connections! When I first met Sylvia (Benefiel) she said, "You won't believe who my sister is." She was right. She and Mary Ellen (Harris) do not look alike. And as they are both married they have different last names, etc. So, how do we know? It is because they began to act "like Christ." They began to live out the faith; it became more than a word to them. They began to care for one another. They began to reach out and care for those around them. All people were being welcomed into the community of faith. They became flag bearers of Christ. They were identified with Christ by their Christ-like actions.

Did you notice the two cities identified this morning are both cities on the outside of Jewish heritage? One of the reasons Jonah did not go to Nineveh was that it was not a Jewish city; these were Gentiles. Why would God have anything to do with these people? It was among the Gentile community in Antioch that the message of the Good News began to take root and flourish. The word was transformed into actions. In Nineveh the people put on sackcloth and sat in ashes demonstrating their willingness to change. The followers in Antioch began to live out their faith and people began to see a difference. These people are acting Christ-like. They became a part of the household of Christ—Christians.

What do people call you? Us? Do our actions speak along with our words? What do our actions say to the world? We say we love but so much hate is done in the name of Christ. James asks what good does it do for us to say to a hungry person that we will go home and pray for them. Our faith must be demonstrated by our actions to not only go and pray but to also feed those who are hungry, etc. Believe it or not the world is watching how we act, what we do—more than we realize. More people are turned off, not by our words but by our actions. The famous quote from Gandhi that he may have become a Christian if more of the followers of Christ acted like Christ is still a viable statement for our world today. Many in the “world” also read the Scriptures (maybe more than some Christians) and they know what the Word says. Yet, we so often misrepresent the Name of the one we profess to follow. God is love and we need to find the strength to love as God loves. There are too many examples of how we fail our calling – fail to be more than a word.

I remember my junior high Social Studies teacher. Now I have never figured out why but Social Studies teachers were given the task to teach the evils of smoking. Of course, we all knew that this teacher smoked like a chimney. He never made it through a class without excusing himself for a smoke. He had little influence on us. In fact he often quoted those famous lines, “Don’t do as I do, do as I say.” Too often this is also seen as the motto of many Christians.

We are called to be like Christ. We are called into membership in the household of Christ. Therefore it is imperative that we know what it means to be a member of this household—we call it discipleship. It is imperative that our lives reflect the very image of the God who has called and redeemed us. No one should ever think that it would be easy to be a member of this family. But if we are going to influence and change the world we must live out our faith as members of the household of Christ.

There is a story told of Alexander the Great. A young man was brought before Alexander during one of his campaigns and was charged with desertion, a charge that could mean death. The young man looked like Alexander and it was immediately apparent that Alexander took a liking to this young man. He questioned him about the charges against him and those in the court knew that Alexander would forgive and give the young man a second chance. As the session was nearing an end Alexander is said to have asked the young man his name. The young man sheepishly told Alexander his name. Upon hearing Alexander jumped to his feet and walked quickly over to the young man and asked him again what his name was. The young man stood at attention and replied, “Alexander, sir.” Alexander looked at the young man and replied, “Change your actions or change your name!”

What is your name, Christian?