Sunday, June 24, 1984
WORDS ARE NOT ENOUGH
Matthew 7:21-29

In the 1600s the coronation of a King in England was a full-sized ceremony. Part of the ceremony included the anointing of the new King. The King stripped to the waist and was plentifully anointed on the head, the chest, the shoulders, the back, and the elbows. The idea of anointing the elbows is a good one. As Halford Luccock once said, "What is the use of an anointed head and heart if the elbows have not been oiled so they get into motion and do a job?"

Unfortunately, the anointing of the elbows did not take with King Charles II. He was never much on flexing an elbow on the job. A couplet about him could've served as an epitaph:

> He never said a foolish thing
> And never did a wise one.

The doing was minus! Supposedly he knew all the right words, believed in the right things, but that was it.

However, King Charles II was not the only person to be good at saying things and to be weak in the elbow. There are many always to be found among us: people who need to have their elbows oiled; people who know the right words and are quick to use them, but there is never any doing — it's all talking.

Thus, Jesus said in our Scripture reading for this morning from Matthew's Gospel, "now everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of God, but those who do the will of God. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast our demons in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'"

Jesus is reminding us that there are no magic words in life or in religion. Just because we use the name of Jesus in certain ways or pray in his name is not enough.

God is not so much interested in what we say we believe or in what religious words we learn to use. God is interested in our actions, in our behavior, in how we treat others.

A three-year-old walked into a nursery class in a church school. She was shy and slow to open up to strangers. She was greeted with silence as she entered. No one knew her nae or seemed to care. She was seated on a bench at a long table with a number of other children. The teacher spoke of the meaning of the church and how Jesus is our Savior and Lord and of how we are to call upon Jesus to be our helper in our everyday life. All of what the teacher said was good Christian teaching.

But something else also happened in that class. During that Sunday morning hour, the language of relationship had also been spoken. It told the little three-year-old something else. This little visitor learned that the church she was visiting that Sunday was an unfriendly place where you sat and listened to a lot of words, but not much else happened.

What could be said of that Sunday church school could be said of many adult church experiences, as well. Those of us who want to claim the name Christian must be careful, lest we say one thing with out words and another with our actions.

In our day the warning of Jesus as reported by the Gospel of Matthew is even more appropriate than it was almost 2,000 years ago. We live in a world of words. We live in a verbal society. Millions of wards are spewed at us daily, and we use words to get along in this world.

Sometimes we hear so many words and see no corresponding action that we want o cry out, as Eliza Doolittle does in the musical, “My Fair Lady,” as an introduction to one of the songs, “Words! Words! Words! I’m so sick of words!” Then she sings, “Don’t talk of stars burning above; if you’re in love, show me!”

No doubt there are those in the world who want to cry out to the church and to those of us who call ourselves Christian and say the same, “Words! Words! Words! We’re so sick of words! Don’t talk of Jesus as your personal Savior; show us. Don’t talk about all people being children of God; show us. Don’t talk of God loving all people; show us. Don’t talk of sacrifice; show us. Don’t talk of justice; show us!”

We’ve all felt that way, not only about people who use religious words and language frequently, but about anyone who says one thing and yet does another. Frankly, I’m always a little suspicious when someone uses too much religious language.

Jesus reminds us that good is not impressed with r words or with the fact that we know the correct theological formulations. God is not impressed when we say that we are doing something in the name of Jesus.

It is significant that when Jesus chose his disciples, he did not first sit them down and teach them all the newest theological doctrines or words. Rather, he said to them, “Follow me.” Then they learned their theology in practice and in action. To the woman caught in adultery, he said, “Go and sin no more.” He didn’t at first say, “Look, it’s all a matter of your not having the right beliefs.” To the rich man who came to him and wanted to know what he must do to find meaning in life, Jesus said, “Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and then come follow me.” To the man who was crippled, he said, “Take up your bed and walk!” In every instance, Jesus demanded a change in behavior. He wasn’t concerned very much about right beliefs or correct theology. He knew that these would follow in due course, once the action was taken.

So, Jesus reminds us, “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the Kingdom of God, but those who do the will of God who is in heaven.”

God is our example. Goes does not only speak to us in words; God speaks mostly in actions. In Jesus the love of God became a human being and lived among us.

And when Jesus wanted to let us know that he would be with us and among us forever, he took bread and wine, and just as the bread and wine enter our bodies and become a part of us, so God’s spirit as we have known it in Jesus is always a part of us. That’s the Good News!