

SERMON – 23/2/20

Titus 2:7-15

“Slaves are to submit themselves to their masters and please them in all things. They must not talk back to them or steal from them. Instead, they must show that they are always good and faithful, so as to bring credit to the teaching about God our Saviour in all they do.” (Titus 2:9,10)

Perhaps your immediate reaction to this morning's text is to get stuck at the fact that Paul here is addressing slaves. Perhaps you can feel your outrage rising at any social system that could allow one human being to remove another's liberty simply to make their own life a bit easier. But let me ask you to put your outrage at that away for just now, because while today's cultural context is very different to the one into which the apostle was speaking, the message he gives is one that applies to absolutely every one of us who professes to follow Jesus Christ today.

Ensuring that our actions and our words match up is a perennial problem for human beings – all of us at times must plead guilty to the charge of hypocrisy because we say one thing and we do another, we criticise others for the way they act but fail to see how we are doing every bit as badly at living up to our high ideals.

Our reading this morning is full of exhortations to ensure that our 'walk' as Christians matches our Christian 'talk'. Paul is writing to a young minister of the Gospel urging him to be careful in what he *says* but also to be an example of good behaviour. He suggests that exactly the same message has to be passed on by Titus to those whom *he* is teaching, namely that their actions in daily life should be an outworking of the teaching they have received concerning the Gospel of Christ. And he broadens the application to all followers of Jesus who are to mirror the actions of Him who was the Word made flesh, by living out the message, leaving worldly passions behind us and dedicating ourselves to living self-controlled and godly lives. I am reminded of the words of a prayer by an Aberdonian minister called John Hunter which are particularly appropriate to our theme this morning: Dear Jesus, in whose life I see all that I would, but fail to be,
Let Thy clear light forever shine, to shame and guide this life of mine.
Though what I dream and what I do in my weak days are always two,
Help me, oppressed by things undone, O Thou whose deeds and dreams were one!

'Talk the talk *and* walk the walk' is what Paul is saying to young Titus. And good advice it is to anyone who is called to exercise ministry of any kind. "In all things you yourself must be an example of good behaviour," says Paul to Titus. Be sincere and serious in your teaching. Use sound words that cannot be criticized, so that your enemies may be put to shame by not having anything bad to say about us." What practical, down to earth, good advice that is. Don't let us ever be ashamed of God's Word – what we have in the pages of this Book is sound (that is to say foundational) teaching for life and we should never hesitate to be sincere and serious in our proclamation of it both within and outwith the church – we need to talk the talk. But if that's all we do, people are completely justified in accusing us of hypocrisy. The foundation of the Word needs to be built on by the way we act. Quite simply, like Titus, we each need to be an example of good behaviour so that people can't have anything bad to say about us. Just think what terrible harm has been done to the cause of the Gospel of Christ because people have justifiably had bad things to say about the actions of those who profess to follow Christ. Of course, Christians will often be criticised or bad-mouthed unjustly, and Christian leaders will often be targetted – that is to be expected – but let us devote our energies consciously to living out our faith in a way that will bring glory and honour to God and blessing to those we are called to serve.

But it's not just about churchy stuff that Paul is speaking. He is addressing the living out of our faith in the ordinary and everyday things of life and while that means in the context of the Roman Empire in the 1st century he is speaking to slaves who made up a significant part of the early Church, what he has to say is applicable just as much to you who spend a large part of your life in a workplace environment and to you who give your time to serving others, whether family members or members of groups and organisations of which you are a part. "Slaves are to submit themselves to their masters and please them in all things, writes Paul. They must not talk back to them or steal from them. Instead, they must show that they are always good and faithful, so as to bring credit to the teaching about God our Saviour in all they do."

Probably the most effective Christian witness that can be made is the incontrovertible evidence offered by a lifestyle where words and actions match up to display truth of the Good News about Jesus Christ. We may not be slaves but some of us are employees and if the way we do our work

says something about the faith that motivates us, then that will have an impact on our employers and on those we work with; some of us have to do with people all the time and if we stand out from the crowd as those who don't just follow the ways of the world, however questionable those ways sometimes are, then people will begin to wonder what makes us tick.

It has to be said that in many ways the church in our context is very good at doing practical things that display the love of Christ. I am in the privileged position of being able to see the impact that is made by so many of you on people in the wider community. They may be actions that you think nothing of because they are simply a natural outworking of your faith. Food tidings is such a simple scheme but it has an impact; the way that a brief mention in church last Sunday of the fact that Kathy Dain, the American minister who is coming to work with us for a year, would be arriving to an unfurnished house has led in a matter of days to the house being practically ready now for her to move into on Wednesday – that's pretty amazing; the offer of a lift to someone to visit a sick relative when the buses aren't running;

It is little wonder that cash-strapped authorities are waking up to the fact that Christians are at the forefront of picking up the pieces of our increasingly stretched and even sometimes crumbling social services – youth work like Kythe, support for individuals in need, food banks. It is forgotten that until the state started providing education and social services these tasks had been undertaken by the church for centuries. Perhaps the circle is beginning to turn again.

As people of faith, we think of this as the right and natural thing to do, and in a country with a strong Christian heritage so do many of our neighbours and friends even though they may not profess the Christian faith, but that is changing. The framework of faith which has shaped these islands and indeed Western civilisation for at least 1000 years and given it a moral compass is fast being consigned to the dustbin. The shared values that we once took for granted are fast disappearing and we are beginning to see the fruits of that in the breakdown of society as a whole.

What we as Christians need to take on board in our time is that there is a crying need for us not just to walk the talk – we're doing a lot of that – but to talk the walk. Where we are much, much less successful is in sharing what it is that motivates us as followers of Jesus Christ and that is part of

the reason for this series of sermons over the past few weeks – as a congregation we are not on the whole very confident in speaking about our faith. We don't do it very much even with one another so how good are we going to be at speaking up in the wide blue yonder? Is it any wonder we have not been very successful over the last generation or two in making new disciples? We are hesitant in our grasp of sound doctrine and so we clam up when people ask us about the reason for the hope that we have.

It is timely that two initiatives have come along this year to help build our confidence in sharing the Gospel of Christ with a needy world. We have heard this morning about the Bible 2020 initiative which encourages us simply to stand up and speak out the Word of God. That Word is sharper than a two-edged sword and it does its work in people's lives in amazing ways. That Word comes like the rain and snow and accomplishes the purpose for which God sent it, but it needs to be heard. The Scottish Bible Society is active in walking the talk not just overseas but in our own country through such things as a literacy programme being used in after school clubs for children who have trouble reading, and in training for much-needed trauma counselling across Scotland.

But the Vision 2020 initiative being rolled out by the Presbytery of Perth is also a means to help us growing in confidence in talking the walk through speaking about our faith. The 'Show and Tell' programme is being piloted on Tuesday evenings over the next 6 weeks in Kinnoull Church – I would be delighted if two or three of you would go and do the course in Kinnoull and then help us to facilitate it here in Kinross after Easter. Have a word with me if you would like to know more. It has the potential to reinvigorate our local mission through our day to day conversations with people around us.

If it doesn't scramble your mind too much, the whole message this morning might be summed up in four short phrases – talk the talk, walk the walk, walk the talk and talk the walk. Paul urged Titus to speak sound words and to give an example of good behaviour. He urged slaves to let their deeds bring credit to the Christian teaching they had received. And he exhorts all of us to give up ungodly living and live godly lives, mirroring Jesus' willingness to give Himself so that we may be made pure and be eager to do good. Put simply, let's just bring credit to the teaching about God our Saviour in what we say *and* in what we do. And let's just see what God will do with that.