I Samuel 2:12-17, John 10:31-39

“Do as I say and as I do”

 I’m not sure which parent taught you to drive, but in my family it was my father. He was somewhat patient, but it was very confusing for me because whenever he would drive he would say constantly, now Bob, when you drive, make sure you don’t do what I just did, you have to listen to what I say and don’t pay attention to how I drive. I survived, and now I’m saying the same thing to my daughters.

 It does seem that I’ve been exposed to situations where people in authority have required something beyond what should have legally been theirs. In Italy whenever we registered our passports with the local municipality the secretary of the orphanage where we worked would go with us and take with her a whole ream of paper as a love offering to the bureaucrat in order to ensure that things went smoothly. And it always worked. It almost seemed like in Russia we were constantly paying expediting fees to people in authority in order to get anything done by the state which we needed, sometimes amounting to thousands of dollars.

 Both of our Scriptures today deal with situations where the words and the actions, or better yet the position and title paired with the action of the people involved either don’t match and so as a result produce a blinding hypocrisy in the case of Eli’s sons in Samuel, or where Jesus’ actions in fact reflect incredibly the truth of Jesus’ words that are able to give life and salvation.

 What our task today is to recognize that people are watching. And even beyond that there should be an innate desire for our actions to reflect the love and loyalty that we have for our Savior Jesus Christ. What we do is far greater than what we say, but in fact the two should be complementary. That’s Jesus’ approach here in John. Let’s read.

**READ**

Once again today you are offered two different Scriptures which give us one good example after which we should strive, and one example which reflects the truth for many, but serves as a foil from which we should flee. Samuel was chosen by God to be a priest and to serve him under the watchful eye of the head priest Eli whose sons were also tasked with serving the people and serving God as facilitators for the people to approach God. If you wanted to have a relationship with God you couldn’t sit at home and pray because it was their belief that God was most present at Shiloh which was the religious center for Israel before the temple came into being.

 And in order to have this relationship with God you had to make sacrifices and the priests were the ones who did that for the people. But the sons of Eli, all of the priests except Samuel, while have that role and responsibility, were scoundrels. Their only desire was to feed themselves, like the bad shepherds of Ezekiel from last week.

 The Scripture states these pastors had no regards for the Lord or for the duties of the priests to the people. They had lost their faith but they still served and still had their power over the people. It was a mess. The church was suffering from a real credibility issue and so as a result there was real confusion as to the presence and power of God because his representatives were thieves.

 Over history the church knows what it’s like to have a credibility problem. Emperor Charlemagne in the 800’s used to have altar calls where all those whom he conquered either had to accept Jesus or they would have been killed on the spot. The church really experienced a growth spurt during his time. Session is asking outreach to consider implementing the Charlamagne approach, repent or die. In fact the Reformation came about as a result of the corruption of the church and the indiscrepancy between the God it represented and both the words and the actions that come out of its representatives on earth.

 Ghandi is known as having said, I love Jesus, it’s just those Christians I could do without. Over history there has been a clear distinction created by the church between Jesus and his teachings and his followers and their actions from Nazi Germany to Apartheid South Africa, to our own violent national past.

 The moment we call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ we are we are automatically held to a higher standard. Not fair, right? This past Wednesday I let the session know that as leaders of the church we are held to an even higher standard than that. The message that Jesus gives us today is that if we would call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ, and I pray that you are, then no matter what your toil in life: teacher, farmer, businessman, craftsman, student, parent, retired, we are called to live our lives to a higher calling than those who do not love Jesus.

 If you are a believer in Jesus Christ then these words of Jesus are for us because how we act is a direct reflection on whom we love the most. And as a result we get to ask the question of what role does the church or this body of believers paly in society, or is it so entrenched that we are just like anyone else, no better or worse? I will contend today that we are called by Jesus in these words to live a life where our actions reflect his words and His actions.

 In John 10, again, we find the direct opposite scenario unfolding from what we see in I Samuel. Jesus’ actions directly reinforce his words and serve as an example to his ministry here on earth. Our central and our operative verse for us today is vs. 37 where Jesus states: If I am not doing the work of my Father, then don’t believe me.

 These words, which we will use as our own, followed a verse which has those gathered listening to Jesus taking up stones to kill him not because of what he did, but because of what he said. Earlier he says in verse 30 of chapter 10 that “The Father and I are one”. Those words alone were considered blaspheme because Jesus made himself equal to God.

 The leaders say we aren’t going to stone you for your good works but because of what you said. So the message was you can do anything you want, good or bad, but as long as you keep quiet and don’t ruffle any feathers you’ll be fine. That was the message to us in Moscow as we quietly fed 300 people very day and opened up a medical center but when we wanted to translate our Racial Task Force quarterly report into Russian the church leadership said no. Just do good and don’t make any waves. There is wisdom in that, it is more likely to endear you to people. But Jesus was more than just a good example for us.

 He was a model after which we should aspire to live. In fact, some redemption theories, or theories of atonement, have Jesus coming to earth just to be a good example and show us how to live. We believe that God came to earth in human form through Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could be redeemed for eternity. He didn’t come just to be a good example, even if he was one. There was so much more to his coming to earth. But for today, his example is what should impress us and what should motivate us to live our lives differently as well.

 When he says in vs. 36 that the Father sanctified or made him holy, we get another glimpse into the extent to which Jesus the Son and the Father were truly one. We can’t discard that as insignificant.

 Every single thing he did reflected the true desires of the Father. In the same way what we do and what we say is a reflection upon our Savior and our Father. II Corinthians 5:16-21 are verses you need to write down in your notes as verses to go home and read. It tells us in vs. 17 that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new.

 How does the way we are living now as individuals reflect the newness that we have in Christ Jesus? And I say this fully aware that our Christian life and faith is a journey, but it is one upon which we have to embark. We can’t be content with just living a life where Jesus is not represented well through us.

 Let me be clear that what I do not mean is that we have to build up enough loving acts in order to be saved by our works. We are saved by grace which was reflected on Jesus dying on the cross through faith which is seen in our personal relationship with Jesus. Today we are sending 10 people on a mission trip to West Virginia. That is good in so many different ways. It is good for those participating, it is good for those receiving the work we are bringing, and it looks good for the church to do this. What, did I say something wrong? It should never be our motivation to look good, our motivation should be to please God, to do the right thing, the godly thing.

 But if we go on a mission trip to West Virginia but overlook or pass up an opportunity to reach out to a neighbor, or maybe even a member on Main Street and a secular organization which is not called to living to a higher standard does the deed, then that doesn’t look good. The old axiom that actions speak louder than words is especially true in regards to how we act with our neighbors. Mission trips strengthen us for action, but they also need to have an impact upon us as individuals and as a church.

 Our culture doesn’t hear words any longer, they only see images, they are impressed by actions, by what one can see, touch feel. Not words. Let me show you an example of one of the most popular commercials from the Super Bowl. Did you notice that not a single word was spoken throughout the commercial? Not a word. That’s the new culture in which we live. God calls us to action and to faith, they have to go hand in hand. People may not be listening to us, but they sure are watching what we do.