

**PASSION: Relationships that are Personal, Active, Special, Secure, Inspiring,  
Overwhelming, Near and Always New  
March 4 – Do Actions Speak Louder Than Words?**

Ruth 2: 1-7

John 14: 8-21

Last week Representative Chris Smith, the NJ Republican congressional delegate from Mercer County who was removed as chair of the House Veterans Affairs Committee last year, basically said that he was not surprised to learn of the horror stories about the conditions facing outpatients served by Walter Reed Hospital, perhaps the preeminent veterans' hospital in the US, conditions that were first publicized by the *Washington Post*. Smith was responding to our actions regarding our care of veterans, which doesn't always match up with the words of praise we offer these valiant men and women. "You can't provide medical care on the cheap. I argued about this desperately when I was chairman [of the Veterans Affairs Committee]." In a column written by Tom Moran in the March 2 issue of the *Star-Ledger*, Smith talked about his friction with then-House Leader Tom DeLay: "I didn't want to leave the committee. But when I was summoned to Tom DeLay's office repeatedly to be admonished [for criticizing his own party's efforts to pinch spending on medical care for veterans], I didn't take it. I gave it right back to him. My feeling was that if you're not going to try to make a difference for veterans, then why are you here?" To quote Moran's column, "Smith says he's certain that money will be the core. That's what he found when he investigated similar problems at hospitals run by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Said Smith, 'We found guys lying in their own feces who had not been turned. There was a lack of even basic health care. And resources equals care. If you don't have the right ratio of nurses to patients, if you don't have a sufficient number of specialists, then you get sub-standard care.'" Moran goes on to say, "...shortchanging the veterans is a moral affront. There ought to be a consensus on that. These are the men and women who lost legs and arms because we asked them to take that risk. Some will spend the rest of their lives in wheelchairs, and others have suffered brain damage that make them strangers to their own families. It is pretty simple. We owe them. And the scandal at Walter Reed shows that we are dodging that debt." Both Moran and Smith believe, as Zak said in last week's sermon, that actions speak louder than words. The action, the care that is being provided for these veterans, does not come close to matching our words praising their efforts. We aren't putting our money where our mouths are. When in doubt, always pay attention to the actions, and not the words.

Actions, or the lack of actions, tell others how we REALLY feel about relationships. When two people go out on a date or two, and then one of them stops calling, e-mailing, or sending text messages, we know that there are serious problems, and that one person just wasn't that into the other one. Conversely, if two people are interested in one another, they make the effort to call, to see and interact with each other. When we care about others, we make the effort to stay in touch, to be active. If we sit back and wait, if we only THINK about our relationships but never DO anything about them, those relationships are never going to get off the ground. People have to act – both people – if only one is interested in developing a relationship, that relationship is going nowhere. When we do things that show that we care about the other person, we develop

and solidify bonds of trust and dependability. Those bonds allow relationships to deepen over time.

When Ruth and Naomi got back to Bethlehem, it was at the beginning of the time of the barley harvest. That was a good thing, because according to the book of Leviticus, the poor, widows and orphans were allowed to glean from the harvested fields. Farmers were not supposed to harvest every bit of the fields; they were to leave the edges of the field, and any overlooked crops in the fields for the poor to gather. Ruth had told Naomi that she was committed to her, that Naomi was her real family, in effect, but if Ruth had sat back and waited for Ruth to make the contacts that were also provided for in the look of Leviticus, the ones calling for the nearest male relative to marry Ruth and provide sons for Ruth's dead husband, Ruth may have waited a long time. Naomi has renamed herself "Bitter," and seems to be not particularly aware, nor particularly caring, about Ruth's commitment to her. Naomi still isn't valuing that relationship. But Ruth knows that they need food, and so she asks Naomi for permission to go and gather food, following behind some other people who are harvesting in the neighborhood. Naomi sends her off fairly abruptly, and Ruth gets to work, happening to pick a field that happens to be owned by Boaz, who is somehow connected to Elimelech's family. Her presence attracts Boaz' attention, who happens to be passing by. He asks his foreman about her, and the foreman reports on her request, and her constant, steady labor, her activity on behalf of her mother-in-law and herself. It is her actions that cause the foreman to praise her to Boaz.

Jesus also refers to action, to being active, when He encourages Philip and the other disciples to believe that He, Jesus is in the Father and that the Father is in Him. Jesus refers to both His words, His teachings, and also to His actions, to the works that flow directly from His words. Jesus' words lead directly to action – His words are words that encourage the disciples to be active, to act to bring good news to the poor, sight to the blind, justice to the prisoner – the inbreaking of the kingdom of God right there, right then, just as it is in heaven.

Jesus did this in the context of Passover, in that meal that we now refer to as the Lord's Supper, or communion. Communion is an active thing that we can do – an action that shows that we desire to have a closer relationship with God, through Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus instituted communion because He knew that it IS an activity that helps to build our relationship with Him. In the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup, we remember Jesus' words and deeds, which culminated in His Passion, which grew out of the Father's passion for this world, which He loves so much.

Starting on Ash Wednesday we have had the opportunity to consider other actions that we can do, ways that we can actively respond to God's call in our lives, ways that help us to deepen our walk with the Lord. Those inserts, describing various spiritual disciplines, are still available, along with our devotional books, as instruments to help us become more aware of God's call to us, and ways we can respond to that call. As we come to the table, may we reflect on God's saving actions on our behalf, and may we be strengthened to act in response to that call, practicing spiritual disciplines that help us to develop passion about this love of God, that was made fully manifest in Jesus, a love that is still available to us because Jesus can be present to us even now, through the power of the Holy Spirit. May our words and actions reflect OUR passion, as we wait in the joyful and certain hope of His return. Even so, come soon, Lord Jesus!

#### Ruth 2: 1-7

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you." They answered, "The LORD bless you." Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."

#### John 14: 8-21

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know Me? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own; but the Father who dwells in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if you do not, then believe Me because of the works themselves.

"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in My name you ask Me for anything, I will do it.

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, because He abides with you, and He will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in Me, and I in you. They who have My commandments and keep them are those who love Me; and those who love Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love them and reveal Myself to them."