

Even though this coming weekend is the Blessing of the Animals, you might not want to mention Saint Francis of Assisi to our bishop, Wayne Miller.

In his report to our synod's assembly this year, Bishop Miller issued notice that he is getting tired of hearing Lutherans quote Saint Francis' famous line, "preach the gospel at all times; use words if necessary."

Lifted from a very different social context, this saintly directive too quickly becomes a cover for a Lutheran conspiracy of silence about faith in Christ Jesus.

Bishop Miller understands, as Jesus does, that words have power too, so that first son in the gospel parable, no talk action only, is just as guilty as the second one is.

He argues that the formula followed by the second son, *Words minus works equals nothing*, is something we all basically understand; what we also need to realize is the danger in the first son's approach: *Works minus words equals anything*.

Good work divorced from explanation can be and is done by anyone: civic leaders, corporations, atheists, adherents of any religion, generic do-gooders, prisoners reluctantly doing required volunteer community service, whatever--with nothing to connect such actions to the Christ we worship other than words we need to learn to say.

Miller proposes a third way that we might call "integrity": *Words plus works equals everything*.

After dealing with two half-correct sons, Jesus today turns to a daughter.

Isabelle Rose Dirlam is baptized into Christ this morning, and it is our hope and prayer and assignment that she will follow the third way.

Her parents promise many things *so that she may learn to ... proclaim Christ in word and deed*.

*We promise to support Isabelle and pray for her in her new life in Christ.*

We become the community in which she will learn what it means to listen to God's voice and to work in God's vineyard.

What will she learn by watching and listening to us?

There are certainly enough times that our community behaves like the first son.

When someone identified at a vision discernment event that our congregation is not very "Jesus-y," some people rejoiced, others cringed, but no one disagreed.

We are very comfortable with letting our actions speak louder than our words, especially when we stay in the closet saying nothing at all.

Rightly resisting religious blowhards who spout hatred and nonsense in the name of Jesus, we are wrongly prone to cede the microphone to them by not saying anything ourselves.

We do our faith, but please don't make us talk about it; we will come to meals and meetings together, but please don't make us pray out loud.

We certainly don't want anyone telling us what to do--not the Bible, not the bishop, not the wider church, not even the Vineyard Owner, because we are urban and savvy and independent and punch-drunk with too much choice and freedom and personal power.

We will work the vineyard, but in our own time and on our own terms, and if Isabelle becomes both diligent and defiant, it won't be any mystery where she got it.

Yet there are other times here that we are like that second son.

We go along with the program verbally before going off on our own way.

I fear that mornings like this, when a child is baptized, are one such occasion.

We promise to support a newly baptized child, but an annual postcard in the mail and one invitation to our fine Sunday School when they turn three seems rather thin, and our interaction is inconsistent.

We abdicate much of our shared responsibility to a paid staff pulled in many directions, but there are too many families with too many needs and opportunities to be adequately addressed this way.

There is so much work in the rich vineyard of childhood faith development to be done, but we seem to assume the parents will do it without much help from us beyond Sunday School classes and a staffed nursery.

Are we really living up to our promises as a community?

There is also a third reality among us, a beautiful integrity of word and deed.

Tuesday night we will serve dinner at The Night Ministry, again, as we do each quarter, and people will bring what they said they would bring, whether that's groceries or themselves, and we will feed our homeless neighbors precisely because we are a Christian community.

We worship together in full body and voice, singing, saying, performing and praying the faith that propels and sustains us in the world.

We do invite people into contact with Jesus by our words and our actions, sometimes even both together, so there is a chance that Isabelle will watch and hear us and learn integrity.

We shall see.

Isabelle will grow and change, and so shall Resurrection.

She will pass through phases and stages and seasons, and so shall we.

And there is always the danger, of course, of a fourth way, with neither words nor works, where Isabelle and/or Resurrection drifts away from Christ until we have nothing to do with him, and also nothing to say about him, with no clue how to find the kingdom of God.

This is why, when Isabelle is baptized today, we will sing and dance and celebrate.

It is not at all because we are so confident that she will find the right way.

It is because we are so confident that the Way, the Truth and the Life has found her.

The words and the works, the integrity of God in baptism equals everything.

She is connected to Christ for life, whether she knows it or not, likes it or not, says it or not, behaves it or not, just like us and now with us, because Christ says what he means and means what he says, to the point of being *obedient to the point of death...on a cross*, to the point of rising from the dead, to the point of hearing his gracious heavenly Father send him into our vineyard and saying "I go, sir" and then setting *aside equality with God, emptying himself, taking the form of a slave, and being born in human likeness*.

Isabelle and Resurrection are connected to Christ because Christ connected himself to us, in word and in deed, in faith and in flesh, and that adds up to more than everything.