**WEST CENTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC**

***Listen to Your Life* A Sermon by The Rev. John M. Barrett October 1, 2017**

**THE GOSPEL WITNESS**  Matthew 21:23-32 The first verses of the reading show Jesus outsmarting the chief priests and elders, when they try to get him to commit blasphemy, namely that God Almighty has given him the authority to heal, preach and teach. After this encounter with the chief priests and elders, Jesus tells them a parable, “The Parable of the Two Sons.”

**SERMON** It’s a pity that the two sons in this parable of Jesus never had the benefit of having the Dr. Seuss book, “Horton Hatches the Egg,” read to them as children.

Horton the elephant is tricked into sitting on a nest and hatching a lazy bird’s egg. Despite great trials and hardship for himself during this yearlong effort, Horton will not go back on his word and desert the nest and his promise.

Horton proclaims, “I meant what I said, and I said what I meant. An elephant’s faithful one hundred percent!” throughout the story.

I think Horton’s words: “I meant what I said, and I said what I meant. An elephant’s faithful one hundred percent,” are worth remembering. And if you watch the Nature shows on PBS you know that real-live elephants are 100% faithful, just like Horton.

But the two sons in the parable are not like Horton. They say one thing and mean another. One son says he will go work in the vineyard, and then he doesn’t go, while the other son says he won’t go and work, and yet he does go and work.

Jesus is teaching us that what we do in life matters more than what we say we will do. What we actually accomplish matters more than what we say we will accomplish.

I have always liked the saying, “Let your life speak.” “Let your life speak.” In other words, let your actions show what you think, what you believe, and what you value.

As Eliza Doolittle sings in *My Fair Lady* about the men in her life*:*

*Show Me*

Words Words Words
I'm so sick of words
I get words all day through

First from him, now from you

Is that all you blighters can do?

Don't talk of stars Burning above
If you're in love Show me

Tell me no dreams Filled with desire

If you're on fire Show me

Here we are together
In the middle of the night

Don't talk of spring
Just hold me tight

Anyone who's ever been In love'll tell you that

This is no time
For a chat

Haven't your lips Longed for my touch

Don't say how much Show me, show me

Don't talk of love

Lasting through time

Make me no undying vow

Show me now!

And even as young children in school, when we brought something in for “Show and Tell,” weren’t our classmates more interested in what we showed than what we told?

Each son in the parable has a view of himself that is not congruent with his reality. What each shows is not who he says he is. The first son may see himself as a rebel, independent, with more interesting things to do than go labor in the heat of the vineyard. But although the first son says he won’t go, he realizes that his father needs him, and so he goes and works in the vineyard.

The second son, who told his father that he would work in the vineyard, may think of himself as a good son, who wants to be responsible and please his father. Yet when it comes time to actually go to the vineyard to work, this son follows his own desires rather than his father’s command. The first son likes to think of himself as a good and loyal son, but his reality does not square with this self-perception.

Each son is speaking with his life, rather than his words, as we all do. We may not say one thing and do another, quite so boldly as the two sons, but almost all of us say one thing and do another once in awhile.

And so what might be helpful for us to do, since our lives are speaking, our lives are speaking louder than our words, is for each of us to listen to our life.

What is our life saying to us that we can benefit from hearing? What is our life saying that we can benefit from knowing and thinking about? Where are our interests and passions taking us, perhaps gradually, perhaps tumultuously?

I have learned to listen to my life, both when my life is speaking softly to me and when my life is yelling at me. Perhaps you have learned to listen too. My life was speaking to me the spring of my senior year in college, when I decided to forgo a fellowship for a Master of Arts degree in history at the University of Chicago in favor of a Rockefeller Brothers trial-year fellowship at Yale Divinity School.

When I listened to my life, my life was telling me that I wasn’t really a scholar, an academic. I spent my time and was far more interested in social interaction, social justice and social change. And so instead of becoming a college professor, becoming a college chaplain seemed like it would be a better and truer vocation for me. So off to Yale Divinity School I went to find out if this were true.

Let's look at how we spend our days, especially any discretionary time we might have. Is our life telling us that we are ready for a new direction or that our current direction remains right and true for us? Have our interests and passions changed? Are they changing? Or are they the same as always? Just what is our life saying?

And as we listen to our life, let us remember that God Is Still Speaking. God speaks to us in historical events and intimate moments, in joy and in sorrow, in life and death. God speaks to us in the Church, in the actions and needs of our neighbor, in the devastation and creation of the natural world.

God also speaks to us through our lives, and as we listen to our life, if we hear God say, “Go and work in the vineyard today,” how will we respond? Will our actions match our words?

Amen.

**HYMN OF RESPONSE** *At the Name of Jesus*

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