

## **BEING AND DOING**

### **Sermon for Lent 5:**

LPC, 3/29/09

Two questions this morning: The first question has to do with being. Who are you? Or maybe, what are you?

The second question has to do with doing. What do you do? Or alternatively, what are you doing? Or perhaps, what do you spend your time, money and energy on?

I went to a clergy retreat last week at which contemporary theologian Joan Chittester was quoted. Sr. Joan talked about the need to bring doing and being into full harmony with each other. We need to bring our acts into full agreement with our essential identity.

Does this sound like an abstract problem to you? I assure you it is not. When I think of the times of my life where I have been most desperately unhappy they have been times when what I was doing was at odds with who I am deep down.

For example, at a basic level I am a teacher and a person of integrity. But I worked one year at a preschool where I was expected to put my pupils' best interest second to the administrator's best interest and misrepresent my attendance figures to the state inspector. I stayed out the year at this job for the sake of my students, but I was abjectly miserable. Who I am was badly out of kilter with what I did. Being and doing must synchronize

Now it is a lucky person indeed whose job and identity are perfectly compatible and mutually supportive. I feel that my job now grows out of who I am fundamentally, and I rejoice in this. It's not this way for everyone.

Most of us are lucky enough to find a life's work that does not conflict with our basic identities. There may not be a whole lot of mutual support between our being and our doing, but as long as the two are not in opposition a person can do quite well, as long as he or she finds an outlet for their true personality in some aspect of life: in a hobby for example, or in volunteer work.

Obviously, what we do is not altogether contained by what we do professionally. So let's look at this question of being and doing from another angle.

We here call ourselves Christians. "Christian" is who we are. "Christian" is what we are. But is "Christian" what we *do*? And if what we *do* is not fully supportive of *being* Christian, can we ever be truly happy? Further, can we ever really *do* Christian unless we let ourselves *be* more fully Christian?

Both the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel lesson speak to the necessity to bring being and doing into concert for a person of faith. Jeremiah speaks of a new

covenant – one which the people will be as well as do. This is what Jeremiah means when he says that God will write the law on their hearts. They will not have to be taught the law. They will be the law. The law will not be something they do, it will be who they are. The law will be so deeply identified with who they are that their actions, what they do, will reflect their identity, and they will know God.

The way the Gospel reflects the perfect harmony between being and doing is in the person of Jesus. In no other person have being and doing been so complimentary, so identified with one another. What Jesus does flows completely out of his identity as the Son of God. The Gospel-writer John makes this especially clear. In John's Gospel, Jesus experiences no doubt about his calling to be crucified. He admits that his soul is troubled, but goes on: "What should I say – 'Father save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour." Jesus goes to his death because it is what he came to do. It is who he is.

What does all this mean for us? How can we bring our being and our doing into perfect harmony? How can we have God's law written on our hearts? How can we be like Jesus, confident in what we must do?

We can pray. We can spend time with ourselves and with God. We can make double sure that we spend this time with ourselves and with God before we do anything that may or may not reflect our being.

We can spend time with ourselves, so we know who we are. How can our doing reflect our being unless we know what our being is? How can we know if our being is what's out of kilter unless we spend some time reflecting on what we've done?

We can spend time with God, so we know what God sounds like, feels like, acts like. We can do this by reading scripture, or other holy writings. We can do it in the community of faith, in confidence that God's Spirit is known in the breaking of bread and in the prayers and fellowship. And we can do it just by calling on God and listening.

What we are in the depths of our being is children of God, loved unconditionally, through and through and forever. What the ground of our being is, is love. Only when we take the trouble to be with that love, can we do love.