

Walking that talk?

When I moved to a new city to attend grad school, I went looking for a spiritual community. At one church, I was greeted by members of the hospitality committee who made an incredibly big deal about having me make a visitor's name tag. Compliant, I wrote my first name in thick black letters, peeled the backing off the sticky label, slapped the tag on my lapel — and poof, nothing happened! Not one person acknowledged me that morning. Actions speak more loudly than words, even at church.

Lately I've taken to asking myself: if someone were to observe my behavior rather than listen to what I say, would my life broadcast my faith? By observing me outside of the worship hour, would a stranger know that I am a Christian? If they glanced at the entries in my checkbook or spied the charges on my VISA card, would my faith be immediately evident? What if they saw my iPad browsing history or my movie queue on Netflix? Overhearing how I speak to my naughty kitten, would this individual be convinced? What if they observed how I



Pastor's Perspective

By The Rev. Karen Winkel

drive in rush hour traffic or comment on controversial social media posts? By the way I cast my ballot, would this person be convinced I was a follower of the Prince of Peace?

Years ago, I did volunteer outreach at a Navajo mission church near Utah's Monument Valley. I decided early on that I would say next to nothing about my faith while I was there, partly because a Navajo friend confided that he and

his people had grown weary of listening to missionaries and our well-meaning words.

My plan was this: If asked about my Christian faith, certainly I would respond. Otherwise, I would let the sandwiches I handed out and the rides I gave (and the way I went about these efforts) do the talking. This was almost 30 years ago and still people from those days reach out. Who knew sandwiches and rides could speak so clearly and for so long?

In the Christian tradition, another name for Jesus is "Word Made Flesh." Jesus didn't simply speak of God's love, He embodied it. Belonging to a culture that is heavily dependent upon spoken language, you and I may forget (or at least underestimate) how vital it is that our actions and attitudes conform to the

faith we sing about in worship, endeavor to articulate when praying aloud, or express when conversing with others.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul lays it out like this: our words and ways must be laced with love or else what we've done and said is pointless and empty, just noisy clanging. (I Corinthians 13: 1.)

Thomas Merton, the Christian monk and prolific writer, once put his finger in the chests of believers by remarking that we ought not be quick to condemn someone who no longer believes in God, for perhaps it was our own coldness, avarice, mediocrity, materialism or selfishness that chilled that individual's faith. Yikes!

Henri Nouwen comes at this a different way. He invites us to ask ourselves: "Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions."

The year is still young — let us commit anew to walking our beautiful talk. You and I may well be the only gospel our sisters and brothers read.

Karen Winkel is the pastor of Community Spirit Church in Montrose, which meets at 11 a.m. Sunday at the Ute Indian Museum, 17253 Chipeta Road; 970-765-7070.