Oneness in Purpose and Works

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So, for example, Jesus’ words declare God’s love for the world (3:16), call people to entrust themselves to God (12:44), warn followers how to live in his absence and promise the presence of the Spirit (chs. 13-17), summon people to know eternal life (17:5), challenge disciples to love one another (13:34; 15:12) and send them, in the power of the Spirit, in mission to the world (20:1-22). Jesus’ words express God’s will.

Jesus makes God known in his works:

• Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.” (John 5:19-20)

• “The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.” (John 5:36)

• but the Father who dwells in me does his works. (John 14:10)

Jesus’ works are life-giving and justice-restoring (5:21-22). Jesus calls disciples to follow him and learn from him as the basis of a new community that Jesus forms (1:35-51). He heals people (6:2). These include the son of a royal official at the point of death (10:1-21), a man born blind (9:1-41), and Lazarus who was dead (11:17-44). He also supplies food and drink to those who were lacking it, turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana (2:1-11) and multiplying five loaves and two fish so as to be able to feed the crowd of five thousand at the Sea of Galilee (6:1-14).

What is the significance of these works? Why are there so many sick and hungry folks in the Gospel? The world of the Roman empire was hierarchical with a small power group controlling its resources. Food supply and distribution followed lines of power so that this powerful group ate good quality and plentiful food. Most of the population, however, did not, and many struggled for adequate food, both in quality and quantity. In such a context, diseases of contagion and deficiency were rife.

Jesus’ healings are signs that show this is not the world that God created or desires. They express Jesus doing God’s work of repairing the damage that the empire’s structures inflicted on people. They anticipate the sort of world described in Isaiah 25:6-10a in which God’s will is done and there is abundant good food “for all people.” Jesus’ actions in the Jerusalem temple challenge the center of the leaders’ power over their way of structuring the world (2:13-25).

Jesus’ works express God’s will in creating a different sort of world, one in which all people share in God’s life. Jesus sets out to his followers the challenge of continuing his works:

“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.” (John 14:12)

Jesus invites his disciples, his church – us – into his oneness with God in which we embrace, witness to and work to realize God’s life-giving purposes in our world.

Life-giving words and works are to mark our presence in our world – and our participation in and expression of oneness with God, Jesus, and the Spirit.

Questions:

• What is the societal life-giving work in which your church community participates?
• How and what do our words and works contribute? What changes does it effect?
• What new challenges exist for you?