

**Devotion to God's Table of Grace**  
**March 3, 2024**  
**Mark 11:15-18**  
**Rev. Laurie Crelly, East Church**  
**Grand Rapids MI**

You have all heard the saying WWJD right? What would Jesus Do. It was a popular saying back in the 1990's. People had bracelets and stickers with WWJD on it to remind people to ask themselves "what would Jesus do" in times of important decisions. It was especially popular among youth groups and campus ministries. Thinking about this slogan I Googled it and found an interesting fact. According to Wikipedia it has a lot longer history.

The slogan itself, "What Would Jesus Do" was part of a title of novel written by Rev. Charles Sheldon in 1896 called, "In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?" Sheldon's novel grew out of a series of sermons he delivered in his Congregationalist church in Topeka, Kansas. Sheldon's theology was shaped by a commitment to Christian socialism also known as the Social Gospel that was spreading throughout American and European Protestantism. The ethos of Sheldon's approach to the Christian life was expressed in this phrase "What Would Jesus Do", with Jesus being a moral example as well as a Savior figure in the novel.

Quoting from the Wikipedia article:

In this popular novel, Rev. Henry Maxwell encounters a homeless man who challenges him to take seriously the imitation of Christ. The homeless man has difficulty understanding why, in his view, so many Christians ignore the poor:

The homeless man says:

I heard some people singing at a church prayer meeting the other night,

"All for Jesus, all for Jesus,  
All my being's ransomed powers,  
All my thoughts, and all my doings,  
All my days, and all my hours."

and I kept wondering as I sat on the steps outside just what they meant by it. It seems to me there's an awful lot of trouble in the world that somehow wouldn't exist if all the people who sing such songs went and lived them out. I suppose I don't understand. But what would Jesus do? Is that what you mean by following His steps?

This leads to many of the novel's characters asking, "What would Jesus do?" when faced with decisions of some importance. This has the effect of making the characters embrace Christianity more seriously and to focus on what they see as its core – the life of Christ.

This concept of asking 'What Would Jesus Do', according to the Wikipedia article, also can be traced to Charles Spurgeon (1891), Thomas a Kempis (1418) and Augustine of Hippo (400 AD). These preachers and theologians took scriptural concepts of following in Jesus' footsteps and phrases like "imitating Paul as Paul imitates Christ" from the writings of the New Testament and took it seriously. (Gal. 2:20, 1 Cor. 11:1, 1 Thes. 1:6, Luke 9:23).

Really this concept is a call to all Christians to return to the essence of what we see Jesus doing and teaching so that we can live a more authentic faith pleasing to God. So, what does that include for us? Feeding the poor, caring for the outcast, treating others as equal and being willing to be a servant to all. Jesus' message was quite counter cultural and was a radical message that brought great hope to those suffering under the control and abuse of others in power.

The Three synoptic Gospels, including today's reading have this story at the same place in time, following Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus returns to the temple the next day and does this demonstration of turning over tables and yelling, "this is a house of Prayer for the nations, but you have turned it into a den of thieves."

Jesus is calling the people back to the heart of their faith. Be a place of prayer and blessing for all people not a place of corrupt greed and exploitation. Jesus has spent the past three years walking all over the country healing the sick, feeding the hungry and preaching love to the people. Jesus is seeing the suffering of the people and is moved to action. He comes to the center of his faith, the temple, and he is appalled that the exploitation of people has even seeped into this most holy place, the temple. Instead of relieving the suffering of the people, the religious authorities had become complicit in the exploitation of the people in exchange for power and riches. Mark's version of this story does not have Jesus' full teaching in these passages, but we know that he followed his demonstration with education, a teaching. The people were enthralled by his teaching, and this made the religious leaders feel threatened. In Matthew's version of this story, we have Jesus expounding upon his initial demand for change with a series of Woe teachings directed at the religious authorities. In Matthew 23:23-26 we read this statement among others,

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to

have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and of the plate, so that the outside also may become clean.”

So for us today the question ‘What Would Jesus Do’ may actually include the turning over of tables as we see in this story. Jesus felt the need to take drastic action to get the people’s attention. That is the purpose for demonstrations and protests. To help people wake up to the seriousness of the situation and to demand change or reform.

Jesus came into the temple seeking access to the divine as a worshiper of God and found these tables as obstacles of faith rather than paths to God. He cleared out the obstacles and called the people back to the devotion to seek God through prayer. Still today, during our Lenten Journey we are called to clear out the obstacles that keep us from following Jesus uninhibited and to be true worshippers of God. Worshipers in spirit and in Truth as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John Chapter 4.

For those in the temple that day that had a hunger for such kind of worship, they celebrated Jesus’ message calling for a return to the heart of worship. But those who saw their power and control over the people threatened sought a way to stop Jesus by plotting his death.

When we hear the phrase “What would Jesus do?” it reminds us that we are called to take up our cross, deny ourselves and follow Jesus’ example of authentic faith. It challenges us to see the world through Jesus’ eyes and to respond to the needs that face us as Jesus would. This is a call to discipleship that the first followers heard, it is a call that early church leaders heard like Augustine of Hippo proclaimed. It is a call that Thomas A Kamps proclaimed when he said we should be imitators of Christ. It is the call we heard one hundred years ago when Rev. Sheldon asked, “What would Jesus do?”

A call to reform, to renewal and a recommitment to seeking first God’s kingdom is something that each generation of believers must reclaim. Rev. Sheldon’s phrase, “What would Jesus Do” became popular again in the 1990s when in 1993, Garrett W. Sheldon (great-grandson of the original author) and Deborah Morris published *What Would Jesus Do?: a contemporary retelling of Charles M.*

Sheldon's classic In His Steps. The term WWJD also became popular around this time starting in Holland Michigan where a youth leader used bracelets with WWJD? on them to help her youth remember this phrase. What Would Jesus Do?

When we think about what Jesus did do, we see him healing the sick, feeding the hungry and caring for the most vulnerable. We also see Jesus turning over tables occasionally to raise awareness of the dire need that is out there.

Jesus turned over the money changers table of exchange and transactions and called us back to the table of grace and fellowship. Jesus called all of us back to a place where we are fed and nurtured without cost or burden. Still today Jesus calls us to this table where we receive freely God's love, God's Forgiveness and God's grace.

Come to the table of Grace and be filled. Behold all things have been made ready.

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<sup>i</sup> Wikipedia article "what would Jesus do"

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What\\_would\\_Jesus\\_do%3F#:~:text=The%20phrase%20%22What%20would%20Jesus,by%20Charles%20Sheldon.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_would_Jesus_do%3F#:~:text=The%20phrase%20%22What%20would%20Jesus,by%20Charles%20Sheldon.)