

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Associate Rector

Scripture: Matthew 21:28-32

***“Actions STILL Speak Louder Than Words”***

Less than a month ago I had the privilege of speaking to you about Jesus and His Apostles at Caesarea Philippi and how Peter responded to Jesus' question of who they say that He is. If you recall we not only looked at their response then, but at their response following Jesus' death, following His Resurrection and then after the Day of Pentecost and how each one of them was transformed – enough to lay down their life for their faith in Jesus the Messiah. It was indeed clear that **their actions spoke louder than their words**. The title of that sermon was “Actions Speak Louder than Words.”

What a wonderful blessing it is that in today's Gospel from Matthew, Jesus presents us with another opportunity to look at that very same issue. Our Lord shares with us a parable about two sons who answer their father's request to go work in the vineyard differently – and then go and do the exact opposite of their response. It is a page right out of the child's handbook of responses to the request to clean up your room – “Yup!” ; “I will!”; “Right after this show!” and then promptly go marching off to do something else. This is not isolated to only children – we are all shining examples of **saying one thing and doing another**. There is not one of us who has not done this – c'mon you can admit it.

While we are at it - let me ask you a question. If you found out about the greatest bargain, or the most incredible restaurant with great food and remarkably affordable prices, or you discovered a really cool website, or maybe you saw a movie that brought back a lot of great memories – wouldn't you share that with your friends? I would say that the majority of the people here today are thinking to themselves – “yes, of course.” And now here is the uncomfortable part – **why is it so hard for you to tell others about the most incredible person in your life - Jesus, or about the church that you go to and how it has and continues to change your life?** This is what I have difficulty understanding; I overhear conversations about all sorts of things, filled with excitement and tremendous details – and I cannot help but wonder why we cannot do the same when it comes to sharing our faith! It is not just happening to us today but it was the same in Jesus' day.

God presented His message of salvation to the Jewish leaders first through John the Baptist – and they rejected it. The scorned sinners, the tax collectors and prostitutes received the message with open arms and open hearts. The Jewish leaders' claim of serving God and being faithful to the Torah went along with their being the religious leadership for the people, but in fact **these leaders were not obedient to God**. They totally rejected the message of John the Baptist, just as they rejected the message of Jesus himself. There is a paradox in that the scorned sinners, with no claim to righteousness whatsoever, believed both John the Baptist and Jesus. That is why Jesus said that **they were entering the kingdom of God!** They indeed knew that they were the ones who were desperately in need of grace. I am quite sure that they told their friends of the good news that they had received. In receiving and sharing – and in becoming disciples – their actions spoke louder than words.

For Jesus, doing the will of the Father is much more than a matter of words; it is always a matter of deeds. It is one thing to say one does or WILL do the will of the Father; it is another thing actually to do it. **Words alone mean nothing!** The author of the Epistle of James reminds us “*For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*” (James 2:26) Actions STILL

speak louder than words! Please don't misunderstand me – this is not about earning your way to heaven through works – the work has already been done once, by Jesus on the cross, and we should be so **gratefully obedient** that we want to do for Him, to share Him and His love with others, all for His glory. How is it then that we can share our favorite things and stories, but we cannot get up and share Jesus with others?

I believe that God is more impressed by our performance than by our promises. To put it more plainly – God is not interested in our saying one thing and doing another, or our waiting till we get around to it. I am sure you know of someone – maybe even yourself, who when pressed to a difficult situation **promises God everything they have and everything they are IF** He will only get them to a better place. And when He delivers them from their distress - they soon forget their promise, forget their vow, and get right back to business as usual!

Good intentions! You know what they say about them? The road is paved with them: New Year's resolutions; volunteering to serve on committees and then forgetting about them; promising to read your Bible every day and not opening it once; making commitments and not keeping them. Please understand me, I am not pointing fingers. You know what happens when you point a finger? There are 3 more fingers pointing right back at you! I believe that Jesus wants for each of us to examine our commitment; to examine who we really are. I think God's timing is perfect – and I am grateful for the opportunity to come along side Fr. Ward's new series on Discipleship and to add my agreement.

A preacher told his congregation “we often sing about “Standing on the Promises” while we are “sitting on our premises.”” To be fruitful we must have a faith that acts and brings forth fruit because as James said "*faith without works is dead*" (James 2:26) Please understand me when I tell you that there is no time to delay! We are called to be Jesus' disciples and to act now through being obedient. The time to obey is now! Let me put it to you this way: if you were to delay obeying a stop sign, one of three things might happen. 1) You might get a ticket. 2) You could get in an accident, or 3) you could have a close call and you wind up just barely escaping an accident. The point is: we are fruitful when we are obedient and we are not so successful when we procrastinate and disobey the Lord. Please, be as good as your promises!

An American eagle was flying high over the Niagara River on a cold and wintry day. He saw the body of a young bull floating down river. He thought to himself, "What a great feast!" He landed and sank his talons deep into the carcass and began to feed on it. He thoroughly enjoyed the feast and was unwilling to let it go. He must have thought that he had plenty of time to get away so he continued to eat and would let go at the last minute. Soon he was approaching the Falls and he tried to fly away. He was in for a rude awakening when he found that his feet were frozen to the carcass. He went over the falls to his death. We don't want to wait and miss opportunities in the service of God's kingdom that might be costly to us or even to someone else.

**When we obey - we bear much fruit.** When we are not obeying, we come across as someone blinded and end up leading others who are blind astray. The religious leaders of Israel did not act on God's word through John the Baptist and Jesus and so the repentant sinners would be able to enter God's kingdom instead of them. The difference between the religious leaders and the repentant sinners is just one thing --- obedience. Jesus once said "*He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.*" (Matthew 12:30) When we agree to obey and work in the vineyard --- which is God's kingdom here on earth, we are working and "gathering" with Christ and for Christ! Actions **STILL** speak louder than words!