

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 21:28-32

"Actions STILL Speak Louder Than Words"

About a month ago, on August 27th, 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. You might remember that 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. To me it was 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 what they told him. 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.

If you found out about the greatest bargain, or the most incredible restaurant with great food and remarkably affordable prices with service that you just couldn't believe, or you discovered on the other hand a restaurant that never refilled your water glass - who never came back to see how you were doing – you wouldn't miss the opportunity to tell people. Maybe you found a really great app on your smartphone – they make an app for that called Facebook. If it is so easy to share that stuff – **why is it so incredibly hard for you to tell others about the most incredible person in your life - Jesus, or maybe about the church that you go to and how Jesus has and continues to change your life through your church?** I don't care what church it is that you attend - we have visitors here today who attend other churches – and that is great! You are going to church and that is what matters. I have great difficulty understanding why people have such a hard time telling others about their very, very best friend. I overhear conversations about all sorts of things, and sometimes when a collar walks into the room people change what they are saying. Sometimes I don't wear a collar. It is incredible what you hear in a restaurant! I hear all sorts of stuff, talking about brothers, sisters, grandchildren, children, with excitement and tremendous details – and I cannot help but wonder why people cannot do the same when it comes to sharing our faith! In today's day and age, it is not politically correct to talk the "J" Word. Oh no, we are supposed to leave the "J" Word at home. The "J" Word is Jesus! He doesn't stay away from your life and I cannot understand why people have to tuck Him away into some little pocket that gets ignored. Today, we are NOT ignoring Jesus. Griffin and Emily made an actual decision because they want Kate to have Jesus as a part of her life – forever, and that is why they made that decision about the godparents – because they are honoring all of you to be a part of her life, just as Jesus is a part of her life. How amazing is that?

God presented His message of salvation to the Jewish leaders through John the Baptist – and they rejected it. Sinners, the tax collectors and prostitutes received the message with open arms and open hearts. The Jewish leaders claimed to serve God and being faithful to the absolute letter of the Tora, 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 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 knew that they desperately needed grace. How hard it is for people to admit that they are in need of a Savior! Jesus came into the world for the people who were desperately needing grace – and I am 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 words; it is always a matter of deeds. I am not talking about ‘earning your way to heaven’ – you can’t do anything to earn your way to heaven – you just have to believe what Jesus said. It is one thing to say you do or WILL do the will of the Father; it is another thing actually to do it – like the two sons. Words alone mean nothing – ‘lip service!’ 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!** This is not about earning your way to heaven through works – for the work has already been done once, by Jesus on the cross, once for all -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. So why is it so easy to share our favorite things and stories, but we cannot get up and share Jesus with others?

Today, we are all about to be witnesses of beautiful Sacrament of Baptism. Katherine (Kate) Jeter Evans is about to be blessed by water (from the Jordan River) and the Holy Spirit – to be washed in this sacrament and officially become a member of the Kingdom of God – and welcomed by you – members of that very same kingdom. I promise you – that you will be sharing about her baptism with others. I must commend Emily and Griffin, and big brother Charles, for taking this step for and with Kate – and for her whole family to be promising to see her raised in the faith. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: “*There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” (Ephesians 4:4-6) This beautiful event – which Jesus told Nicodemus about as the way to be ‘born again’; Jesus said “*I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*” (John 3:5-6) Thank you Emily, Griffin and Charles! In just a few moments we will do just that – and baptize Kate with water and an anointing with holy chrism, (oil) - as outward signs of the inward grace (the definition of a sacrament) that she receives through the Holy Spirit.

You know, I believe that God is more impressed by what we do than by what we promise to do. God is not interested in our saying one thing and doing another, or our waiting till we get

around to it. How many of us are guilty of – when something is stressful in our lives that we try to make a deal with God ‘that if You will only take care of this and let this go’ – then ‘I will do this, this and this.’ We never get around to doing ‘this, this, and this’ – but God takes care of us. I am sure you know of someone – maybe even yourself, who when pressed to a difficult situation goes down that road. Everything matters. And when He delivers them from their distress - they soon forget their promise, the ‘this, this, and this,’ forget their vow, and get right back to business as usual!

A preacher once 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 produces fruit because as James said, “*faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26) There is no time to delay! We are called to be Jesus’ disciples, followers - and to act now through being gratefully 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 on the other hand - we are not so successful when we procrastinate and disobey the Lord. Please, be as good as your promises!

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! As we will witness in just a moment - **actions STILL speak louder than words!**