

## **Actions Speak Louder Than Words**

14 December, 2016

Reading: Luke 7:18b-23

God of the Living Word

May our actions so match our words that others can see Your Love

Through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

We always laugh at a friend of mine. When the family are gathered for tea he yells at his daughter "Gwendolyn don't shout at the dinner table." It seems actions speak louder than words.

My hunch is if we could do half of what we talk about the world would be a much better place.

I think we must be in a ground hog day because we have had today's reading about John the Baptist over and over again. Never mind. It's a good one. John is in prison. He starts to hear rumours of what Jesus is doing and so asks his followers to go and ask this Jesus if he is the Messiah, the promised One of God, or if they should wait for someone else. Now most of us, if we were asked our identity, would say who we are. At the bank the other day I was asked to prove who I am. So I produced my driver's licence. But Jesus doesn't say or show any proof of his identity like we would. Rather he points to what he is doing.

"Go and tell John what you see and hear - the blind are given sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." In other words my actions speak louder than any words.

Like it or not this is the question the world asks of us Christians. They are less interested in what we believe than how we behave. If we were asked to prove we are Christians, could we give a list of what we are doing in Christ's name?

Last week it was reported to me that a family from another church had started coming to our mainly music. "Why did you make the change?" the leader asked them. "Because here we feel loved," they said.

This is the litmus test. Are we loving? Jesus even predicted this; they will know you are Christians, he said, by your love.

There is nothing more attractive than a community where love exists. The reverse is also true. There nothing more off-putting than a community that talks about love and then doesn't live it.

Sometimes there is a disconnect between how we behave towards each other and our community and what we say. People in the community love this as a ready built excuse to give up on church. "They're no better than the rest of us," they say, "Why would I bother?" Nowhere is this more obvious than our relations with other Christians. Again Jesus words, (which are more than words, they are a prayer), that we might be one that the world might believe. The reverse is true, too, when we aren't one the world has an excuse not to believe.

When we have a disagreement (and we always will have them) the process is important. Are we ready to listen and slow to judge? Can others find a place at the table or is it closed to all but the elect?

The history of Christianity so far is of smaller and smaller groups forming around more and more petty issues.

The story is told of a church in Scotland. The technology was just starting that enabled false teeth. One group thought that it was God's will for us to lose our teeth and to have false ones was going against his will, another group were sure that God has given us the brains to make false teeth, so why not. Each side had biblical passages to back their view. In the end they split. I think Jesus wept that day. Today you can still go to the churches. They have long forgotten why they broke away but the bitterness lingers.

This Christmas practice love. Love goes by many names: mercy, pity compassion, care, forgiveness, patience, kindness, generosity. Practice love. Practice love because others are watching on wanting our actions to not match our words. Practice love because that's what Jesus did. Practice love, for no other reason than it is in the end more fulfilling.

*'In the evening of life' writes John of the Cross, 'we will be judged on love alone.'*

When we live by love, others will go and tell what they have seen, the blind seeing, the emotional lame walking and the poor having good news brought to them.

Our actions speak louder than our words.