

# Actions Speak Louder than Words

11 December 2022

St Peter's

Readings: Isaiah 35:1-10, Matthew 11:2-11

*Open the Scriptures to us in a fresh and exciting way.  
In Jesus name we ask it.*

A very warm welcome to those that have come today particularly to remember loved ones who have died. I wrote to the families of the 23 funerals we had this year inviting them to come and remember their loved ones, but I know all of us have people whose memory we cherish. It sure is important to take time just before the Christmas celebrations to pause, to acknowledge what special people have meant to us, to be aware of the pain their memory brings us, but also to give thanks for their lives.

There's an old saying, "Actions speak louder than words."

That's certainly true when it comes to a time of grief in our lives. My father died when I was just 17, and I can't remember one word anybody said to me, although plenty of well-meaning words were said. I can't remember one card that was sent to me, although many were. I can't remember one sermon or one prayer. But I can remember who held my hand during the services. I can remember who hugged me, I can remember who brought food around to the house. Come to think of it, I can actually always remember who brings food around to the house. In a time of grief, actions speak louder than words. I'm sure you have had a similar experience.

Our Gospel finds John the baptizer in prison. He has been waiting his whole life for the Messiah, and he wants to know if Jesus is the Messiah, the promised of God. So, he sends one of his followers to find out. Notice how Jesus answers this question, "*Are you the one or should we wait for another?*" He doesn't say, "*Look, tell him I'm the one.*" but he tells them to tell John what has been happening. "*Tell him what you see: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them*". In other words, actions speak louder than words.

Some 600 hundred years earlier, actions spoke louder than words too. I think the most beautiful writing in all human literature is found in Isaiah. Isaiah is pointing to the time of the coming messianic age, not with words, but with actions. "*The desert shall blossom, weak hands will be strengthened, fearful hearts made strong, the eyes of the blind opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the speechless sing for joy. Waters shall break forth in the wilderness and the burning sand shall become a pool, a spring of life giving water.*" Little wonder that the early Christians saw these words fulfilled in Jesus.

For us, our actions go ahead of us too. St Francis said to preach the gospel always and only if necessary, use words.

St Peter's is full of people trying, through their actions, to make a difference in the world. In every community I have ever been in it is Christians who are the salt and light.

There is a wonderful scene in the movie *Shadowlands*. *Shadowlands* is the film based on the book CS Lewis wrote – *A Grief Observed*. CS Lewis was not only the author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* but he was also a great theologian. He married later in life to a woman he knew was dying. They had to find a young trendy curate to marry them. His beloved wife does die, and in the movie, her young son and Lewis are sitting. “*Why did mum have to die?*” the son asks. There is a long pause “*I don't know,*” Lewis answers, and they weep together. But it is in the weeping that the boy finds most comfort. CS Lewis, perhaps more than anyone else alive, could have given a wonderful theologically coherent answer. But it's in the weeping that most is said. You see, actions speak louder than words.

The Cherokee Indian tribe of North America had a practice that went back before anyone could remember. In order to become a man, the boys of the tribe had to go and sit in the forest. For a whole night. The forest of the native American Indians was not a friendly place. There were bears that would happily eat you, coyotes, lions and other tribes looking for a quick scalp.

But the boys had to sit on a tree stump, blindfolded from sundown to sun up on their own. Once they had endured the night then they were deemed to be a man.

Each boy had a similar tale to tell. It was utterly terrifying. Once you blindfold yourself and the dark descends the forest comes alive. Every noise makes your heart leap, every shadow seems to promise death. Once the first rays of sunshine begin, the boy takes off his blindfold. It is then he discovers the secret. Sitting right alongside him, ready at any moment to protect him, is his father. He never leaves his side but is with him right through the longest darkness night, not saying a word, his actions speaking for him.

This is what happens to us in a time of grief. It can be along and dark night, but God, our loving parent, is always right beside us. Never leaving our side, no matter how dark the night. It's only in the dawn of the promised day that we will know how truly close our loving God has been to us.

It's in this love that we can let our loved ones go.

God loves the world so much that he gave us his only son at Christmas. So that we might never need to feel alone again. Often, it's when we look back on our dark times, times of struggle and heartache that we see God's presence with us. In the face of a child, the beauty of the earth, the embrace of a loved one, the kindness of a stranger.

God has promised never to leave us alone. Because, in the final analysis, this action speaks louder than any words.