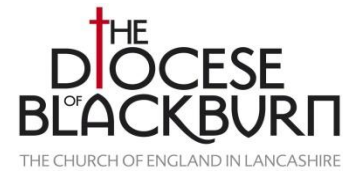


WEEKLY SERMON

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The Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32:

According to my search engine, Mark Twain is credited as saying, 'Actions speak louder than words but not nearly as often'. This saying, often quoted, shows that people make judgements, not on promises but on whether a person lives out what they believe. I know that I am deeply moved when people demonstrate their love actively and not just by their words.

In today's passage, Jesus tells a story about two sons and asks his listeners for their response. A father asks his sons to help him in his vineyard. The first says, 'no' but later changes his mind and goes to help. The second says, 'yes' but never goes. Jesus asks a simple question, 'which one obeyed?'

The point of the story is clear and simple. The one who obeyed is the one who went to help his father. Jesus teaches that our actions matter.

Reading from the start of Matthew 21, we see that Jesus demonstrates, by his actions, who He is and why He came. His first action is to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. He comes to fulfil Old Testament promises by God that a King would come.

His Kingship is different, however, to the leadership demonstrated by other rulers. He came humbly and gently. Jesus' second action is to clear the temple of people buying and selling. Dramatically, He shouts that the temple is a place of prayer. It is to be a place where everyone, including outcasts and foreigners, can worship God. Immediately after clearing the temple, we read that the blind and the lame find healing. Following these healings, Jesus teaches his disciples through the cursing of the fig tree, that faith is about a relationship of practical trust in God.

From Jesus' actions leading up to this parable, we learn that He is the King, the promised Messiah. We see that He is a person of integrity. He is a person who wants everyone to find healing and new life. In the parable, the invitation to work in the father's vineyard is offered to both sons. Jesus' offer of life is open to everyone. However, we see two different responses. The one who is obedient is the one who changes his mind and goes to help.

Jesus then goes on to explain his story in words which must have made His listeners, the Jewish leaders, feel very uncomfortable. He states that the people most despised by the chief priests and elders, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes, would get into the Kingdom of God before they would. Underlining his point further, Jesus reminds them of how John the Baptist had demonstrated that the right way to live was to believe in Jesus and turn away from wrong ways of living.

Jesus' story is a challenging read. Actions matter; believing in Jesus and repenting (turning around) make it possible for us to accept Jesus' invitation to find life. This story is also encouraging and inspiring. Reading it in the context of the chapter, we discover that Jesus is God's promised King. He demonstrates, through his actions, that He wants everyone to find the life that He offers. He heals the lame and the blind. He clears the way for outcasts and outsiders to find a way into His Kingdom. He also makes it possible for people to change their mind and find the promised life.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Jesus challenged his listeners with the question, 'Which of the two obeyed his father?' The challenge to obey can still be heard. As we listen, let us remember who it is who calls us to obey; it is the King of Kings who has open arms to welcome us in even when we feel unworthy and may have gone our own way.

Joy Rushton, Being Witnesses Manager