

Stewardship – Belief in Action

Actions can speak louder than words.

An adage that most of us have heard many times.

Back in the day, about 30 years ago, my brother-in-law Don was a regular smoker. But the rule made before the first child was born was, no smoking in the house. After a meal, Don would often go out the patio door and stand on the deck in the back yard to smoke a cigarette. Leaning against the railing he would stand and puff away on his cigarette before going in to help with the dishes after the meal and whatever other chores needed to be done. He did it after every meal and no-one thought anything more about it.

One fall, when my nephew was about 4 years old, and my in-laws were visiting, my father-in-law went out on the deck to check on his grandson playing out there, rather quietly, too quietly.

He found the little boy standing next to the railing, arm reaching up to the top rail, holding on. In his other hand was a stick which he would put up to his lips, suck air in noisily, and then move the stick away, and flick it like he was flicking away the ashes from the end of a cigarette.

What are you doing? asked Grandpa. Smoking like Daddy, came the reply.

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The value of an action, the importance of an action versus speaking shows up in several of sayings, such as:

Preach the good news, use words if you have to.

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours” St Teresa of Avila, 16th century mystic. We are the hands that will break and share the bread and fish with the hungry.

The transactions through your bank account says a lot about your values and beliefs. All the ways we spend our money, whether we have a little or a lot, speak about our true priorities.

Our actions, whether we give of our time, our talent or our treasure, our stewardship, are actions that can change how a person feels.

If actions speak louder than words, what does today’s parable of the sower say to us?

To be clear, all parables have many interpretations or understandings. That, in many ways, is the great strength, joy and sometimes frustration of the parables that Jesus told. The bulk of the crowds that gathered around Jesus were Jewish farmers, fishermen or day labourers. Often there would also be some the pharisees, scribes and elders from the temple in Jerusalem, and some of the Roman colonizers and soldiers. Each group would have different understandings of the same parable. The Galileans and the Romans would understand them differently. Our view on the parables will be different again.

In the most common interpretations of the parable of the sower, and in the explanation that Jesus gives to the disciples is that the seed is the word of the kingdom of God, or the teaching

of Jesus. It is something that the people may hear and then may not understand or not respond to.

And when the seed, the word does land on fertile ground, with someone who both hears the message and responds to the word, the good news, the message; then the yield can be enormous. Like the ear of wheat that grows from a single seed. Or the ear of corn that grows from a single kernel.

One person hears and shares the word of the Kingdom of God with another person, and another person. Quickly the number of people who have heard the good news can be large. It can be thirty or sixty or even one hundred people who have heard.

But what if instead of speaking, or telling, the person acts. Actions can get around the problem that we do not all speak the same language. Offering a mug of hot tea or a glass of cold water has the same message, whether or not we speak the same language. The offer of a mug of hot tea or a glass of cold water is likely to be remembered long after the vent. Or more precisely, how the offer made us feel – wanted and cared for.

Sometimes our money or actions may have no impact, like the seed landing on hard ground.

Sometimes our money or actions will be swallowed up or smothered by other actions that we cannot control, such as a corporation spending lots of money, like the seed landing among the thorns or weeds.

Sometimes our money or actions will do some good for a short time, such as buying a sandwich or a coffee for a person on the street. It is like the seed that lands in shallow soil, springs up and withers in the sun.

Sometimes our money or actions will thrive where we share them and yield huge benefits.

There is an adage – give a person a meal and they eat today, teach a person to fish and they eat for a lifetime.

We can advocate for change, such as for the availability of low cost and accessible housing, top of the news feed in our area. It can change the life of a person or family.

The work we do with the deanery refugee committee and the families that we have supported is an example of actions that have born great fruit, thirty-fold, sixty-fold and one hundred-fold.

Not everything that we do will be accepted or welcomed. The timing may not be the best, other actions may overwhelm our actions. And some actions will change lives forever for the better.

Our actions, our use of our time, our talent and our treasure, our stewardship are how we will be remembered and more importantly how God will be made known to the world around us.

As Jesus says, what we do for the least of these for do for Jesus.

Thanks be to God for the gifts received and shared. Amen.

Readings: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23