

““What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.

Matthew 21:28-45 NRSV

In accounting circles it's called substance over form meaning the form of the transaction may look correct but when you dig deeper, it's the substance that really matters. Another way to express it is that actions speak louder than words. These names jump out to me as I read this text from the gospel of Matthew Jesus uses parables and actions to say it's what you do that matters not simply what you say.

Chapter 21 begins with Jesus entering Jerusalem, which is Palm Sunday and he enters the temple and immediately is frustrated with the corruption, and he cleanses the temple and returns the tables. Then he sees a fig tree that's not producing any fruit and he curses it suggesting again that's what you do that matters not what you say. And then we have these parables. In the first the person talks to a good game, but doesn't deliver. Contrast that with the second person who says no, but actually delivers. Actions speak louder than words. Jesus commended the second and goes on to commend the prostitutes and the tax collectors and not the religious folk for their actions.

In the second parable, Jesus once again condemn the actions of those who mistreat the son of the master despite anything they may say. The ones who are rewarded are the ones who produce fruit.

Both stories challenge me as a pastor in that they want to know what I'm actually doing and producing rather than simply saying. Actions speak louder than words. And it asks some questions of me. While I'm a preacher forgiveness, do people know me as a forgiving soul. While I may talk about serving others, can I point a fruit that is born by my actions. Well, I may talk about welcoming the stranger can I point to times I've gone out of my way to welcome and serve another. While I may Reed and Matthew about sharing faith with others, can I point the time when I've done it.

In short when God reviews my actions rather than just my words what will God see? What about you? This whole week consider for a few moments not simply your words, but your actions. Consider not simply the form but the substance. consider not simply the hopes or intentions, but actually the fruit that is produced. And ask yourself: am I content with that? Or what needs to change?

*Gracious God keep me focused on you this Holy Week and what you ask me to do. Inspire me to do more than just say. Challenge me to bear the fruit that will feed others and feed myself. Keep me focused upon the cross and the sacrificial ways that you love us; in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*