

This morning I want to draw attention to the actions we have all already taken during Lent, and how they speak volumes for our faith (at the same time as helping us to grow in faith).

This Lent, we have acted together, most ably led by our housegroups (to whom the most tremendous thanks are due). We have committed ourselves **to growing together into God**. We have built our Prayer Cairn on Ash Wednesday to symbolise that commitment and to pray for each other. We have shared with each other what we think and feel about the major themes of Easter in our housegroups using the *Table Talk for Easter* game.

This week, we have boisterously entered Jerusalem/Church together on Palm Sunday to witness a leather-jacketed Jesus riding on a scooter! We have followed our Lord's twin instructions at the Last Supper to wash one-another's feet, that great leveller of humanity, and to make Eucharist together, that great expression of our union with God. These are the side-to-side human-to-human arm of the Cross, the down-to-up, God-to-man arm of the cross. Both are examples of our following the advice attributed to St Francis of Assisi to '*preach the Gospel and if necessary use words*'.

On Good Friday, we have shared the depths of love and suffering so starkly visible as we knelt at the foot of the cross; and we have recognised that suffering and love are **the** great spiritual teachers. We have left our burdens at the foot of the cross, with Christ in his death, so that we too might be raised to freedom and new life in the resurrection of Easter day.

So now we come to Easter day and our re-assertion of our faith in God by renewing our baptismal promises.

In short, we have demonstrated, and will demonstrate, our faith to each other and to God in a series of **actions**, full of meaning; **actions which speak louder than words**.

The Christian Gospel is not merely about **words**; words you can just juggle with in your head until you find them *intellectually* satisfying, defining some sort of **mental belief**, however arbitrary.

The Christian Gospel is about **actions**, *whole being* responses which go beyond mental gymnastics into the hard physicality of real life. Such actions go beyond intellectual *belief* to the lively reality of **faith** in God.

The Christian Gospel is about **faith** (what you do with your whole being) not simply about **belief** (what you do with your mind).

It is your **actions** which reveal your **faith**; '*By their fruit you shall know them*', as Jesus said (Matt 7v 16). And **actions speak louder than words**.

The great events of Easter are just that; **events, actions**, things that happened. They are not just philosophical *words* or *theories*; they are **God's actions that speak louder even than God's words**.

God does not just sit idly by watching the events of the world as if they were in a soap opera on cosmic TV. God is **present** in his world. God **intervenes** in his world; that's what the whole history of the Bible tells us. God **acts** in his world day by day.

The life-story of Jesus is *not just* a story of a teacher who taught a new ethical way of living; though there were major elements of ethical teaching in his life.

The life-story of Jesus is *not just* a story of a man who helped others to live close to God through their prayer and their service of others; though there are major elements of that too.

The life-story of Jesus is not even really just what Jesus did or did not do, the miracles, the healings, the signs of the Kingdom, important as they are.

The life-story of Jesus is really about **what God did for Jesus, God's actions** towards Jesus which Jesus did not himself initiate. Most importantly today, it is **the action of God to raise Jesus** to new life after his cruel death on the Cross that we celebrate.

The resurrection is not something Jesus did to himself, it was something God did to Jesus; it was **God's** action; God raised him from the dead, as the Creeds put it. Jesus felt completely forsaken by God on the Cross *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* he cried. But **God acted powerfully** and raised Jesus from the sealed tomb in which his dead body was lain.

It is God's action in resurrecting of Jesus which is at the heart of the Christian faith. It is **that action which speaks louder than any words** of *teaching or persuasion or theology*. Without **that** action of God, the Christian story would be so much verbiage; and the Christian Gospel would be mere oratory. It is God's action in raising Jesus from the dead which we celebrate today as the foundation of our faith.

And that action of God speaks louder than *any* words.

In a moment we shall re-affirm our faith and renew our baptismal promises, but first I want to emphasise again this difference between a mental belief and a whole being faith.

FAITH = BELIEF + TRUST

Faith is more than a mental belief, it requires TRUST to make a whole being response.

Let me illustrate what I mean using the cross literally as a bridge.

It is one thing to believe with your mind that the bridge of the cross **could** carry your weight.

It requires more, it requires TRUST, to actually walk across that bridge, as it were, with your whole being

That's what we call a step of FAITH.

FAITH = BELIEF + TRUST

You'll hear that expressed in the questions of our baptismal renewal liturgy; **Do YOU believe and trust...**

In short, Do YOU have faith?

So let's renew our baptismal promises together.